THE LITTLE COLONEL IN ARIZONA

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

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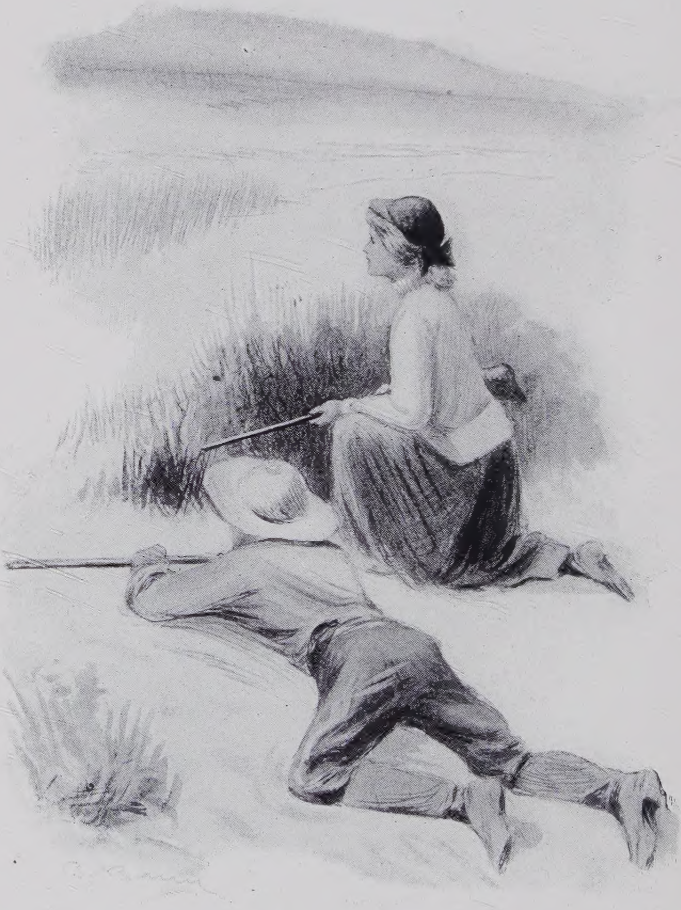

THE DUCK HUNT

(*See page 168*)

THE LITTLE COLONEL
IN ARIZONA

BY

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

AUTHOR OF
"THE LITTLE COLONEL SERIES," "BIG BROTHER,"
"OLE MAMMY'S TORMENT," "JOEL: A BOY
OF GALILEE," "ASA HOLMES," ETC.

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THE
LITTLE COLONEL IN ARIZONA

CHAPTER I.

MARY TELLS ALL SHE KNOWS

"JOYCE," said Jack Ware, stopping beside his sister's seat in the long, Western-bound train, "I wish you'd go back into the observation-car, and make Mary stop talking. She's telling all she knows to a couple of strangers."

"Why don't you do it?" asked Joyce, looking up from her magazine with a teasing smile. "That dignified scowl of yours ought to frighten anything into silence."

"I did try it," confessed Jack. "I frowned and shook my head at her as I passed, but all the good it did was to start her to talking about *me*. 'That's my brother Jack,' I heard her say, and her voice went through the car like a fine-pointed needle. 'Isn't he big for fourteen? He's been wearing long trousers for nearly a year.' They both turned to look at me, and everybody smiled, and I was so embarrassed that I fell all over myself getting out of sight. And it was a girl she said it to," he continued, wrathfully. "A real pretty girl, about my age. The fellow with her is her brother, I reckon. They look enough alike. He's a cadet from some military school. You can tell by his uniform. They laugh at everything that Mary says, and that makes her go on all the worse. So if you don't want them to know all our family history, past, present, and to come, you'd better go back and shut up that chatterbox. You know what Mary's like when she gets started."

"Yes, I know," sighed Joyce, "but I don't dare move now. Norman has just fallen asleep, and he's been so restless all day that I don't want him to waken until mamma has had her nap." She glanced down at the little six-year-old brother stretched out on the seat beside her with his head in her lap, and then across the aisle at her mother, lying with her white face hidden among the shawls and pillows.

"If I send for Mary to come back here, she'll flop around until she wakes them both. Can't you get her out on to the rear platform for awhile? I should think she would enjoy riding out there on one of those little camp-stools. Slip one of those oranges into your pocket, and whisper to her to follow you out and guess what you have for her."

"Well, I'll try," said Jack, dubiously, "but I'm almost sure she won't budge. It isn't every day she gets an audience like that. It flatters her to have them laugh at everything she says, and as sure as I stop and speak to her she'll say something that I don't want to hear."

"Oh, never mind, then," said Joyce. "They are strangers, and probably we'll never see them again, so it won't make any difference. Sit down here and forget about them. You can have this magazine in a minute, just as soon as I finish reading this half-page."

But Jack did mind. He could not forget the amused glances that the pretty girl had exchanged with her big brother, and after standing irresolutely in the aisle a moment, he strolled back to the observation-car. Slipping into a wicker chair near the door, he sat waiting for Mary to look in his direction, so that he could beckon her to come to him.

Half the passengers had gone to sleep and forgotten that they were being whirled across the great American Desert as fast as the limited express-train could carry them. Some were reading, and some gazing out of the windows at the monotonous wastes of sand. The only ones who really seemed to be enjoying the journey were his small sister and her audience of two. She sat on a footstool in the aisle, just in front of them, a box of candy in her lap, and a look of supreme satisfaction on her face. Two little braids of blond hair, tied with big bows of blue ribbon, bobbed over her shoulders as she talked. Jack was too far away to hear what she said, but his scowl deepened whenever the girl exchanged amused glances with her brother.

"This candy is almost as good as the fudge we used to make at home every Saturday afternoon," said Mary, putting a chocolate-covered marshmallow in her mouth, and gravely running her tongue around her lips. "But we'll never again make any more fudge in that house."

"Why not, dear?" asked the girl, with encouraging interest. This child was the most diverting thing she had found on the long journey.

"Oh, everything has come to an end now. Joyce says you can never go back when you've burned your bridges behind you. It was certainly burning our bridges when we sold the little brown house, for of course we could never go back with strangers living in it. It was almost like a funeral when we started to the train, and looked back for the last time. I cried, because there was the Christmas-tree standing on the porch, with the strings of pop-corn and cranberries on it. We put it out for the birds, you know, when we were done with it. When I saw how lonesome it looked, standing out in the snow, and remembered that it was the last Christmas-tree we'd ever have there, and that we didn't have a home any more, why I guess *anybody* would have cried."

"Why did you sell the little home if you loved it so?" asked the girl. It was not from any desire to pry into a stranger's affairs that she asked, but merely to keep the child talking.

"Oh, mamma was so ill. She had pneumonia, and there are so many blizzards in Kansas, you know, that the doctor said she'd never get rid of her cough if she stayed in Plainsville, and that maybe if we didn't go to a warm place she wouldn't live till spring. So Mr. Link bought the house the very next day, so that we could have enough money to go. He's a lawyer. It used to be Link and Ware on the office door before papa died. He's always been good to us because he was papa's partner, and he gave Jack a perfectly grand gun when he found we were coming out among the Indians.

"Then the neighbours came in and helped us pack, and we left in a hurry. To-morrow we'll be to the place where we are going, and we'll begin to live in tents on New Year's Day. You'd never think this was the last day of the old year, would you, it's so warm. I 'spose we'll be mixed up all the time now about the calendar, coming to such a different climate."

There was a pause while another marshmallow disappeared, then she prattled on again. "It's to Lee's Ranch we are going, out in Arizona. It's a sort of boarding-camp for sick people. Mrs. Lee keeps it. She's our minister's sister, and he wrote to her, and she's going to take us cheaper than she does most people, because there's so many of us. Joyce and Jack and Holland and Norman and mamma and me makes an even half-dozen. But we're going to keep house as soon as our things come and we can get a place, and then I'll be glad that Jack has his gun. He can't shoot very well yet, unless it's at something big like a stable door, but you always feel safer, when there's Indians around, if you've got something to bang at them."

Here she lowered her voice confidentially. "Holland scared Norman and me most to death one night. We were sitting on the rug in front of the fire, before the lamp was lighted, saying what would we do s'posen an Indian should come to the camp sometime, and try to scalp us, and just when we were so scared we didn't dare look around behind us, he rolled out from under the bed where he'd been hiding, and grabbed us by the hair, with the awfullest whoop, that made us feel as if we'd been dipped in ice-water. Why, we didn't stop yelling for half an hour. Norman had the nightmare that night. We never did find out how Joyce punished Holland, but what she did to him was plenty, for he hasn't scared us since, not yet, though you never know when he's going to.

"Joyce isn't afraid of anything on earth. You ought to hear about the way she played ghost once, when she was in France. And she just talked right up to the old monsieur who owned the Gate of the Giant Scissors, and told him what she thought of him."

"How old is this Joyce?" asked the tall young fellow whom his sister called Phil. "She sounds interesting, don't you think, Elsie?" he said, leaning over to help himself to a handful of candy.

Elsie nodded with a smile, and Mary hastened to give the desired information. "Oh, she's fifteen, going on sixteen, and she *is* interesting. She can paint the loveliest pictures you ever saw. She was going to be an artist until all this happened, and she had to leave school. Nobody but me knows how bad it made her feel to do that. I found her crying in the stable-loft when I went up to say good-bye to the black kitten, and she made me cross my heart and body I'd never tell, so mamma thinks that she doesn't mind it at all.

"Things have gone wrong at our house ever since I had the mumps," she began again, when she had slowly crunched two burnt almonds. "Holland sprained his wrist and mamma nearly died with pneumonia and Norman upset the clothes-horse on the stove and burnt up a whole week's ironing. And after that Jack had both ears frosted in a blizzard, and Bob, our darling little fox-terrier that Joyce brought from Kentucky, was poisoned."

"That *was* a list of misfortunes," exclaimed Phil, sympathetically, "enough to discourage anybody."

"Oh, at our house we never get discouraged to *stay*," answered Mary. "Of course we feel that way at first, but Joyce always says 'Remember the Vicar,' and then we stiffen."

"The vicar," echoed Phil, much puzzled.

"Yes, the Vicar of Wakefield, you know. Don't you remember what bad luck they all had, about the green spectacles and everything, and he said, '*Let us be inflexible, and fortune will at last change in our favour!*'"

"Was there ever anything funnier!" exclaimed Phil, in an aside, as this bit of wisdom was rolled out with such a dramatic toss of the head, that the big blue bows on the little blond braids bobbed wildly. "The idea of a child like that reading the 'Vicar of Wakefield.'"

"Oh, I didn't read him myself," answered Mary, eager to be entirely truthful. "Joyce read it aloud to all the family last winter, and since then we've all tried to do as the Vicar did, be inflexible when troubles come. Even Norman knows that if you'll swallow your sobs and *stiffen* when you bump your head, or anything, that it doesn't hurt half so bad as when you just let loose and howl."

Jack started to his feet when he heard the laugh that followed, sure that Mary was saying something that ought to be left unsaid. He reached her just in time to hear her remark, "We're going to eat in the dining-car to-night. Our lunch has all given out, and I'm glad of it, for I never did eat in a dining-car, and I've always wanted to. We're going to have ice-cream, if it doesn't cost too much."

Jack's face was crimson as he bent down and whispered in Mary's ear, and it grew several shades redder as she calmly answered aloud, "No, I don't want to go out on the platform. It's blowing so hard, I'll get my eyes full of sand."

He bent again to whisper, this time savagely, and then turned back toward the other car, not waiting for her answer. But it followed him shrilly in an indignant tone: "It's no such a thing, Jack Ware! I'm not telling all I know."

A few minutes later a freckle-faced boy of twelve appeared in the door, looking up and down the car with keen gray eyes. The moment his glance fell on Mary, he started down the aisle toward her with such an air of determination that she started up in dismay.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "There's Holland beckoning for me. Now I've got to go."

"Why should you go for him rather than Jack?" asked Phil. "He isn't nearly so big."

"You don't know Holland," said Mary, taking a step forward. "He doesn't mind making a scene anywhere we happen to be. If he was told to bring me, he'd do it, if he had to drag me down the aisle by my hair. Good-bye. I've had a mighty nice time, and I'm much obliged for the candy."

The Ware family were already seated in the dining-room when Phil and Elsie went in to dinner a little later. Mary, over her soup, was giving an enthusiastic account of her new acquaintances. "They're going to their grandfather's in California," she said. "It's the most beautiful place you ever heard of, with goldfish in the fountain, and Gold of Ophir roses in the garden, and Dago, their old pet monkey, is there. They had to send him away from home because he got into so much mischief. And Miss Elsie Tremont, that's her name, is all in black because her Great-Aunt Patricia is dead. Her Aunt Patricia kept house for them, but now they live at their grandfather's. Mr. Phil is only seventeen, but he's six feet tall, and looks so old that I thought maybe he was thirty."

"Gracious, Mary, how did you find out so much?" asked Joyce, with a warning shake of the head at Norman, who was crumbling his bread into his soup.

"Oh, I asked him if he was married, and he laughed, and said he was only seventeen, just a schoolboy, a cadet in a military academy out in California. There they are now!" she added, excitedly, as the waiter pulled out two chairs at the little table across the aisle.

Both the newcomers smiled at Mary, who beamed broadly in response. Then they gave a quick side-glance at the rest of the family. "What a sweet-looking woman the little mother is," said Elsie, in a low tone, "and Joyce *is* interesting, but I wouldn't say she is exactly pretty, would you?"

"Um, I don't know," answered Phil, after another politely careless glance in her direction. "She has a face you like to keep looking at. It's so bright and pleasant, and her eyes are lovely. She'd be jolly good company, I imagine, a sort of a surprise-party, always doing and saying unusual things."

In the same casual way, Joyce was taking note of them. She felt strongly drawn toward the pretty girl in black, and wished that they were going to the same place, so that she might make her acquaintance. Once when they were all laughing at something Norman said, she looked up and caught her eye, and they both smiled. Then Phil looked across with such an understanding gleam of humour in his eyes that she almost smiled at him, but checked herself, and looked down in her plate, remembering that the handsome cadet was a stranger.

The train stopped at a junction just as Mary finished her ice-cream, which she had been eating as slowly as possible, in order to prolong the pleasure. Finding that there would be a wait of nearly half an hour, Joyce persuaded her mother to go back to the rear platform of the observation-car, and sit out awhile, in the fresh air. Although the sun was down, it was so warm that Mrs. Ware scarcely needed the shawl Joyce drew around her shoulders.

"I can't believe that this is the last day of December," she said to Mary, as Joyce hurried into the station to make some inquiry of the ticket-agent. "The last day of the old year," she added. "These electric-lights and the band playing over there in the park, and all the passengers promenading up and down in front of the station, bareheaded, make it seem like a summer resort."

Mary peered after the promenading passengers wistfully. The boys had disappeared to watch the engine take water, and there was no one for her to walk with. Just then, Phil and Elsie Tremont, sauntering along, caught sight of her wistful little face.

"Don't you want to come too?" asked Elsie, pausing. "You'll sleep better for a little exercise."

"Oh, yes!" was the delighted reply. "May I, mamma? It's Miss Elsie Tremont, that I told you about, that ran away with a monkey and a music-box when she was a little bit of a girl."

"I'm afraid that with such an introduction you'll think I'm not a proper person to trust your daughter with, Mrs. Ware," said Elsie, laughing, "but I assure you I'll never run away again. That experience quite cured me."

"Probably Mary has given you just as alarming an impression of us," answered Mrs. Ware. "She has never learned to regard any one as a stranger, and all the world is her friend to confide in."

"Wouldn't you like to walk a little while, too?" asked Elsie, stirred by some faint memory of a delicate white face like this one, that years ago used to smile out at her from a hammock in the Gold of Ophir rose garden. She was only five years old the last time she saw her mother, but the dim memory was a very sweet one.

"Yes, come! It will do you good," urged Phil, cordially, influenced partly by the same memory, and partly by the thought that here was a chance to make the acquaintance of Joyce as well. According to her little sister she was an unusually interesting girl, and the glimpse he had had of her himself confirmed that opinion.

So it happened to Joyce's great astonishment, as she hurried back to the train, she met her mother walking slowly along beside Elsie. Phil, with Mary chattering to him like an amusing little magpie, was just behind them. Almost before she knew how it came about, she was walking with them, listening first to Elsie, then to Phil, as they told of the boarding-school she was going back to in California, and the Military Academy in which he was a cadet. They had been back home to spend the Christmas vacation with their father, whom they did not expect to see again for a long time. He was a physician, and now on his way to Berlin, where he expected to spend a year or two in scientific research.

At the warning call of all aboard, they hurried back to the car just as the boys came scrambling up the steps. Acquaintances grow almost as rapidly on these long overland journeys across the continent as they do on shipboard. The girls regretted the fact that they had not found each other earlier, but Jack and Phil soon made up for lost time. Phil, who had hunted wild goats among the rocks of Catalina Island, and Jack, who expected unlimited shooting of quail and ducks at Lee's Ranch, were not long in exchanging invitations for future hunting together, if either should happen to stray into the other's vicinity.

"I feel as if I had known you always," said Elsie to Joyce, as they separated, regretfully, at bedtime, wondering if they ever would meet again. "I wish you were going to the boarding-school with me."

"I wish you were going to stop in Arizona," answered Joyce. "Maybe you can come out to the ranch sometime, when you are on your way back East."

"I think that we ought to all sit up together to see the old year out and the new year in," protested Mary, indignant at being hurried off to bed at half-past seven.

"You'll see the change all right," remarked Jack, "and you'll have a chance to make a night of it. We have to get off at Maricopa a little after midnight, and there's no telling when that train for Phœnix will come along. They say it's always behind time."

Late that night, Elsie, wakened by the stopping of the train, looked at her watch. The new year had just dawned. A brakeman went through the car with a lantern. There were strange voices outside, a confusion of calls, and the curtains of her berth swayed and shook as a number of people hurried down the aisle, laden with baggage. Somebody tripped over a pair of shoes, left too far out in the aisle, and somebody muttered a complaint about always being wakened at Maricopa by people who had no more consideration for the travelling public than to make their changes in the dead of night.

"Maricopa," she thought, starting up on her elbow. "That is where the Wares are to get off." Raising the window-shade, she peered out into the night. Yes, there they were, just going into the station. Jack and Holland weighted down with baggage, Joyce helping the sweet-faced little mother with one hand, and dragging the drowsy Norman after her with the other, Mary sleepily bringing up the rear with her hat tipped over one eye, and her shoe-strings tripping her at every step.

"Bless her little soul, she's the funniest, fattest little chatterbox of a girl I ever saw," thought Elsie, as she watched her stumble into the station. "Good-bye, little vicar," she whispered, waving her hand. "May you always keep inflexible." I wonder if I'll ever see any of them again. I wish I were in a big family like that. They do have such good times together."

As the train pulled slowly out and went thundering on into the darkness, she tried to go to sleep again, but for a long time, whenever she closed her eyes, she saw the little house in Kansas that Mary had described so vividly. There it stood, empty and deserted in the snow, with the pathetic little Christmas-tree, left for the birds. And far away, the family who loved it so dearly were facing blithely and bravely the untried New Year, in which they were to make for themselves another home, somewhere out on the lonely desert.

"Oh, I do hope they'll keep 'inflexible,'" was Elsie's last waking thought. "I do hope they'll have a happy New Year."

CHAPTER II.

A ROBINSON CRUSOE OF THE DESERT

JOYCE stood in the door of the little adobe house, and looked out across the desert with tears in her eyes. If *this* was to be their home through all the dreary years that stretched ahead of them, it hardly seemed worth while to go on living.

Jack, in the bare unfurnished room behind her, was noisily wielding a hatchet, opening the boxes and barrels of household goods which had followed them by freight. He did not know which one held his gun, but he was determined to find it before the sun went down.

For nearly three weeks they had been at Lee's Ranch, half a mile farther down the road, waiting for the goods to come, and to find a place where they could set up a home of their own. Boarding for a family of six was far too expensive to be afforded long. Now the boxes had arrived, and they had found a place, the only one for rent anywhere near the ranch. Joyce felt sick at heart as she looked around her.

"Here it is at last," called Jack, triumphantly, dropping the hatchet and throwing pillows and bedding out of the box in reckless haste to reach his most cherished possession, the fine hammerless shotgun which Mr. Link had given him Christmas. He had intended to carry it with him on the journey, in its carved leather case, but in the confusion of the hurried packing, some well-meaning neighbour had nailed it up in one of the boxes while he was absent, and there had been no time to rescue it. He had worried about it ever since.

"Oh, you beauty!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hand along the polished stock as he drew it from the case. Sitting on the floor tailor-fashion, he began whistling cheerfully as he fitted the parts together.

"Joyce," he called, peering down the barrels to see if any speck of rust had gathered in them, "do you suppose we brought any machine-oil with us? I'll uncrate the sewing-machine if you think that the can is likely to be in one of the drawers."

"I don't know," answered Joyce, in such a hopeless tone that Jack lowered his gun-barrels and stared at her in astonishment. Her back was toward him, but her voice certainly sounded choked with tears. It was so unusual for Joyce to cry that he felt that something very serious must be the cause.

"What's the matter, sister?" he inquired. "You aren't sick, are you?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed, with a sob, turning and throwing herself down on the pile of pillows he had just unpacked. "I'm sick of everything in this awful country! I'm sick of the desert, and of seeing nothing but invalids and sand and cactus and jack-rabbits wherever I go. And I'm sick of the prospect of living in this little hole of a mud-house, and working like a squaw, and never doing anything or being anything worth while. If I thought I had to go on all my life this way, I'd want to die right now!"

Jack viewed her uneasily. "Goodness, Joyce! I never knew you to go all to pieces this way before. You've always been the one to preach to us when things went wrong, that if we'd be inflexible that fortune would at last change in our favour."

"Inflexible fiddlesticks!" stormed Joyce from the depths of a bolster, where she had hidden her face. "I've been holding out against fate so long that I can't do it any more, and I'm going to give up, right here and now!"

"Then I don't know what will become of the rest of us," answered Jack, raising his empty gun to aim at a butcher-bird in the fig-tree outside the door. "It's you that has always kept things cheerful when we were down in the mouth."

Joyce sat up and wiped her eyes. "I think that it must be that old camel-back mountain out there that makes me feel so hopeless. It is so depressing to see it kneeling there in the sand, day after day, like a poor old broken-down beast of burden, unable to move another step. It is just like us. Fate is too much for it."

Jack's glance followed hers through the open door Straight and level, the desert stretched away toward the horizon, where a circle of mountains seemed to rise abruptly from the sands, and shut them in. There was Squaw's Peak on the left, cold and steely blue, and over on the right the bare buttes, like mounds of red ore, and just in front was the mountain they must face every time they looked from the door. Some strange freak of nature had given it the form of a giant camel, five miles long. There it knelt in the sand, with patient outstretched neck, and such an appearance of hopeless resignation to its lot, that Joyce was not the only one who found it depressing. More than one invalid, sent to the surrounding ranches for the life-giving atmosphere of Arizona, had turned his back on it with a shiver of premonition, saying, " It's just like me! Broken-down, and left to die on the desert. Neither of us will ever get away."

It made no difference to Jack what shape the mountains took. He could not understand Joyce's sensitiveness to her surroundings. But it made him uncomfortable to see her so despondent. He sat hugging his gun in silence a moment, not knowing how to answer her, and then began idly aiming it first in one direction, then another. Presently his glance happened to rest upon a battered book that had fallen from one of the boxes. He drew it toward him with his foot. It was open at a familiar picture, and on the opposite page was a paragraph which he had read so many times, that he could almost repeat it from memory.

" Hello!" he exclaimed. " Here's an old friend who was in as bad a fix as we are, Joyce, and he lived through it."

Leaning over, without picking up the book from the floor, he began reading from the page, printed in the large type of a child's picture-book:

" 'September 30, 1609. I, poor, miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwrecked during a dreadful storm in the offing, came on shore this dismal, unfortunate island, which I called the Island of Despair, all the rest of the ship's company being drowned, and myself almost dead. All the rest of the day I spent in afflicting myself at the dismal circumstances I was brought to, viz., I had neither house, clothes, weapons, nor place to fly to, and in despair of any relief saw nothing but death before me, either that I should be devoured by wild beasts, murdered by savages, or starved to death for want of food.' "

A long pause followed. Then Joyce sat up, looking teased, and held out her hand for the book. "I don't mind old Crusoe's preaching me a sermon," she said, as she turned the tattered leaves. "Now he's done it, I'll quit 'afflicting myself at the dismal circumstances I was brought to.' I've wished a thousand times, when I was smaller, that I could have been in his place, and had all his interesting adventures. And to think, here we are at last, in almost as bad a plight as he was. Only we have a weapon," she added, with a mischievous glance at the gun Jack was holding.

"And that means food, too," he answered, proudly, “ for I expect to kill many a quail and duck with this.”

“ Oh, we’re better off than Crusoe in a thousand ways, I suppose, if we’d only stop to count our blessings,” she answered, now ready to take a more cheerful view of life since she had had her little outburst of rebellion. “ He didn’t have a Chinaman driving by with fresh vegetables twice a week, as we will have, and we have clothes, and a house, such as it is, and a place to fly to, for Lee’s Ranch will always be open to us if we need a refuge.”

“ So we can start at the place where Crusoe was when he really began to enjoy his Island of Despair,” said Jack. “ Shall I go on unpacking these things? I stopped when you announced that you were going to give up and die, for I thought there wouldn’t be any use trying to do anything, with you in the dumps like that.”

Joyce looked around the dingy room. “ It’s not worth while to unpack till the place has been scrubbed from top to bottom. If we’re going to make a home of it, we’ll have to begin right. The landlord won’t do anything, and we could hardly expect him to, considering the small amount of rent we pay, but I don’t see how we can live in it without fresh paper and paint.”

" I wish we'd find a ship cast up on the sands of the desert to-morrow," said Jack, " that would have all sorts of supplies and tools in it. The shipwrecks helped old Robinson out amazingly. I'd make a bookcase if we did, and put up shelves and all sorts of things. This would be a fine place to show what I learned in the manual training-school. We need benches and rustic seats out under those umbrella-trees."

" We'll have to buy some tools," said Joyce. " Let's make out a list of things we need, and go to town early in the morning. Mrs. Lee said we could borrow Bogus and the surrey to-morrow."

" All right," assented Jack, ready for anything that promised change.

" And *Jack!* " she exclaimed, after a long slow survey of the room, " let's paint and paper this place ourselves! I'm sure we can do it. There's a tape measure in one of the machine drawers. Suppose you get it out and measure the room, so we'll know how much paper to buy."

Joyce was her old brave, cheery self again now, giving orders like a major-general, and throwing herself into the work at hand with contagious enthusiasm. With the stub of a pencil Jack found in his pocket, she began making a memorandum on the fly-leaf of Robinson Crusoe. "Paint, turpentine, brushes, screws, nails, saw, mop, broom, scrubbing-brush, soap," she wrote rapidly.

"And a hatchet," added Jack. "This one belongs to the Mexican at the ranch. And, oh, yes, an axe. He says that Holland and I can get all the wood we need right here on the desert, without its costing us a cent, if we're willing to chop it; mesquite roots, you know, and greasewood."

"It's fortunate we can get something without paying for it," commented Joyce, as she added an axe to the list. Then she sat studying the possibilities of the room, while Jack knocked the crate from the machine, found the tape measure, and did a sum in arithmetic to find the amount of paper it would take to cover the walls.

"I can see just how it is going to look when we are all through," she said, presently. "When this old dark woodwork is painted white, and these dismal walls are covered with fresh light paper, and there are clean, airy curtains at the windows, it won't seem like the same place. Mamma mustn't see it till it is all in order."

Exhausted by the journey, Mrs. Ware had been too weak to worry over their future, or even to wonder what would become of them, and had handed over the little bank-book to Joyce.

" Make it go just as far as it will, dear," she said. " You are too young to have such a load laid on your shoulders, but I see no other way now." Joyce had taken up the burden of responsibility so bravely that no one but Jack knew of her moments of discouragement, and he was forgetting her recent tears in her present enthusiasm.

" Oh, I wish it was to-morrow," she exclaimed, " and we had all our supplies bought so that we could begin."

" So do I," answered Jack. " But it's nearly sundown now, and the supper-bell will be ringing before we get back to the ranch, if we don't start soon."

" Well, lock the doors, and we'll go," said Joyce, beginning to pin on her hat.

" Oh, what's the use of being so particular! Mrs. Lee says everybody is honest out in this country. They never turn a key on the ranch, and they've never had anything taken either by Mexicans or Indians in all the years they've lived here. It isn't half as wild as I hoped it would be. I wish I could have been a pioneer, and had some of the exciting times they had."

Nevertheless, Jack barred the back door and locked the front one, before following Joyce across the yard, and over the little bridge spanning the irrigating canal, into the public road. They stood there a moment, looking back at the house, just one big square adobe room, with a shed-kitchen in the rear. Around three sides of it ran a rough sort of porch or shack, built of cottonwood posts, supporting a thatch of bamboo-stalks and palm-leaves. While it would afford a fine shelter from the sun in the tropical summer awaiting them, it was a homely, primitive-looking affair, almost as rough in its appearance as if Robinson Crusoe himself had built it.

"It's hopeless, isn't it!" said Joyce, with a despairing shake of the head. "No matter how homelike we may make it inside, it will always be the picture of desolation outside."

"Not when the leaves come out on that row of umbrella-trees," answered Jack. "Mrs. Lee says they will be so green and bushy that they will almost hide the house, and the blossoms on them in the spring are as purple and sweet as lilacs. Then this row of fig-trees along the road, and the clump of cottonwoods back of the house, and those two big pepper-trees by the gate will make it cool and shady here, no matter how scorching hot the desert may be. We'll have to give them lots of water. Oh, that reminds me, I'll have to have a pair of rubber boots, if I am to do the irrigating. The water will be in again day after to-morrow."

Joyce groaned as she opened the book she was carrying, and added boots to the long list on the fly-leaf. "What a lot it's going to take to get us started. Crusoe certainly had reason to be thankful for the shipwrecked stores he found."

"But it'll cost less to get the boots than to hire a Mexican every eight days to do the irrigating," said Jack.

Following the road beside the canal, they walked along in the last rays of the sunset, toward the ranch. Birds twittered now and then in the fig-trees on their right, or a string of cows went lowing homeward through the green alfalfa pastures, to the milking. The road and canal seemed to run between two worlds, for on the left it was all a dreary desert, the barren sands stretching away toward the red buttes and old Camelback Mountain, as wild and cheerless as when the Indians held possession. Some day it too would "rejoice and blossom like the rose," but not until a network of waterways dug across it brought it new life.

Once as they walked along, a jack-rabbit crossed their path and went bounding away in a fright. A covey of quail rose with a loud whirr of wings from a clump of bushes beside the road, but they met no human being until Holland and Mary, just from school, came racing out from the ranch to meet them with eager questions about the new home.

Chris, the Mexican, had made the round of the tents, building a little fire of mesquite wood in each tiny drum stove, for in February the air of the desert grows icy as soon as the sun disappears. Mrs. Ware was sitting in a rocking-chair between the stove and table, on which stood a lamp with a yellow shade, sending a cheerful glow all over the tent. Joyce took the remaining chair, Jack sat on the wood-box, and Mary, Norman and Holland piled upon the bed, to take part in the family conclave. The canvas curtain had been dropped over the screen-door, and the bright Indian rugs on the floor gave a touch of warmth and cosiness to the tent that made it seem wonderfully bright and homelike.

"I don't see," said Mary, when she had listened to a description of the place, "how we are all going to eat and sleep and live in one room and a kitchen. It takes three tents to hold us all here, besides having the ranch dining-room to eat in. What if Eugenia

Forbes should come from the Waldorf-Astoria to visit us, or the Little Colonel, or some of the other girls from Kentucky, that you knew at the house-party, Joyce? Where would they sleep?"

"Yes," chimed in Holland, teasingly, "or the Queen of Sheba? Suppose *she* should come with all her train. It's about as likely. We would have to play 'Pussy wants a corner' all night, Mary, and whoever happened to be 'it' would have to sit up until he happened to find somebody out of his corner."

"Goosey!" exclaimed Mary, sticking out her tongue at him and making the worst face she could screw up. "Honestly, what would we do, Joyce?"

"We're not going to try to live in just one room," explained Joyce. "The doctor said mamma ought to sleep in a tent, so we'll get a big double one like this, wainscoted up high, with floor and screen-door, just like this. Mamma and you and I can use that, and the boys will have just an ordinary camping-tent, without door or floor. They have been so wild to be pioneers that they will be glad to come as near to it as possible, and that means living without extra comforts and conveniences. In the house one corner of the room will be the library, where we'll put papa's desk, and one corner will be the sewing-room, where we'll have the machine, and one will be a cosy corner, with the big lounge and lots of pillows. If the Queen of Sheba or the Little Colonel should do such an improbable thing as to stray out here, we'll have a place for them."

"There goes the supper-bell," cried Norman, scrambling down from the bed in hot haste to beat Mary to the table. Joyce waited to turn down the lamp, close the stove draughts, and bring her mother's shawl, before following them.

"How bright the camp looks with a light in every tent," she said, as they stepped out under the stars. "They look like the transparencies in the torchlight processions, that we used to have back in Plainsville."

Mrs. Ware's tent was in the front row, so it was only a step to the door of the dining-room in the ranch house. The long table was nearly filled when they took their seats. Gathered around it were people who had drifted there from all parts of the world in search of lost health. A Boston law-student, a Wyoming cowboy, a Canadian minister, a Scotchman from Inverness, and a jolly Irish lad from Belfast were among the number.

The most interesting one to Joyce was an old

Norwegian who sat opposite her, by the name of Jan Ellestad. Not old in years, for his hair was still untouched by gray, and his dark eyes flashed at times with the spirit of the old vikings, when he told the folk-lore of his fatherland. But he was old in sad experiences, and broken health, and broken hopes. The faint trace of a foreign accent that clung to his speech made everything he said seem interesting to Joyce, and after Mrs. Lee had told her something of his history, she looked upon him as a hero. This was the third winter he had come back to the ranch. He knew he could not live through another year, and he had stopped making plans for himself, but he listened with unfailing cheerfulness to other people's. Now he looked up expectantly as Joyce took her seat.

" I can see by your face, Miss Joyce," he said, in his slow, hesitating way, as if groping for the right words, " that you are about to plunge this ranch into another wild excitement. What is it now, please?"

" Guess!" said Joyce, glancing around the table. " Everybody can have one guess."

During the three weeks that the Wares had been on the ranch they had made many friends among the boarders. Most of them could do little but sit in the sun and wait for the winter to creep by, so they welcomed anything that relieved the monotony of the long idle days. Mary's unexpected remarks gave fresh zest to the conversation. The boys, bubbling over with energy and high spirits, were a constant source of entertainment, and Joyce's enthusiasms were contagious. She was constantly coming in from the desert with some strange discovery to arouse the interest of the listless little company.

Now, as her challenge passed around the table, any one hearing her laugh at the amusing replies would not have dreamed that only a few hours before she was sobbing to Jack that she was sick of seeing nothing but invalids and sand and cactus.

"We haven't any name for our new home," she announced, "and I'm thinking of having a name contest. Any one can offer an unlimited number, and the best shall receive a prize."

"Then I'll win," responded the Scotchman, promptly. "There's nae mair appropriate name for a wee bit lodging-place like that, than *Bide-a-wee.*"

"That is pretty," said Joyce, repeating it thoughtfully. "I love the old song by that name, but I'm afraid that it isn't exactly appropriate. You see, we may have to bide there for years and years instead of just a wee."

"Give it a Spanish name," said the minister. "Alamo means cottonwood, and you have a group of cottonwoods there. That would be just as good as naming it The Pines, or The Oaks, or The Beeches."

"No, call it something Indian," said the cowboy. "Something that means little-mud-house-in-the-desert, yet has a high-sounding swing to the syllables."

"Wait till we get through fixing it," interrupted Jack. "It'll look so fine that you won't dare call it little-mud-house-in-the-desert. We're going to paint and paper it ourselves."

"Not you two children," exclaimed the Norwegian, in surprise.

"With our own lily fingers," answered Joyce.

"Then you'll have an interested audience," he answered. "You'll find all of us who are able to walk perching in the fig-trees outside your door every morning, waiting for the performance to begin."

"Whoever perches there will have to descend and help, won't they, Jack?" said Joyce, saucily.

"Oh, mamma," whispered Mary, "is Mr. Ellestad really going to climb up in the fig-tree and watch them? *Please* let me stay home from school and help. I know I can't study if I go, for I'll be thinking of all the fun I'm missing."

CHAPTER III.

A DAY AT SCHOOL.

It was with a most unwilling mind and an unhappy heart that Mary began her third week at school. In the first place she could not bear to tear herself away from all that was going on at the new house. She wanted to have a hand in the dear delights of home-making. She wanted to poke the camp-fire, and dabble in the paste, and watch the walls grow fresh and clean as the paper spread over the old patches. The smell of the fresh paint drew her, and gave her a feeling that there were all sorts of delightful possibilities in this region, yet unexplored.

In the second place, life in the new school was a grievous burden, because the boys, seeing how easily she was teased, found their chief pleasure in annoying her. She was a trusting little soul, ready to nibble the bait that any trap offered.

" Never mind! You'll get used to it after awhile," her mother said, consolingly, each evening when she came home with a list of fresh woes. " You're tired now from that long walk home. Things will seem better after supper." And Joyce would add, " Don't look so doleful, Mother Bunch; just remember the vicar, and keep inflexible. Fortune is bound to change in your favour after awhile." But the third Friday found her as unhappy as the third Monday.

There were two rooms in the school building, one containing all the primary classes, the other the grammar grades, where Holland found a place. Mary had one of the back seats in the primary department, and one of the highest hooks in the cloak-room, on which to hang her belongings. But this Friday morning she did not leave her lunch-basket in either place.

She and Patty Ritter, the little girl who sat across the aisle from her, had had an indignation-meeting the day before, and agreed to hide their baskets in a hedgerow, so that there could be no possibility of Wig Smith's finding them. Salt on one's jelly cake and pepper in one's apple-pie two days in succession is a little too much to be borne calmly. Wig Smith's fondness for seasoning other people's lunches was only one of his many obnoxious traits.

" There," said Mary, scanning the horizon anxiously, to see that no prowling boy was in sight. "Nobody would think of looking behind that prickly cactus for a lunch-basket! We're sure of not going hungry to-day!"

With their arms around each other, they strolled back to the schoolhouse, taking a roundabout way, with great cunning, to throw Wig Smith off the track, in case he should be watching. But their precautions were needless this time. Wig had set up a dentist's establishment on the steps of the stile, his stock in trade being a pocket-knife and a hat full of raw turnips. Nothing could have been friendlier than the way he greeted Mary and Patty, insisting that they each needed a set of false teeth. Half a dozen of his friends had already been fitted out, and stood around, grinning, in order to show the big white turnip teeth he had fitted over the set provided by Nature. As the teeth were cut in irregular shapes, wide square-tipped ones alternating with long pointed fangs, and the upper lip had to be drawn tightly to hold them in place, the effect was so comical that they could hardly hold the new sets in position for laughing at each other.

In payment for his work, Wig accepted almost anything that his customers had to offer: marbles, when he could get them, pencils, apples, fish-hooks, even a roll of tin-foil, saved from many chewing-gum packages, which was all one girl had to trade.

A search through Mary's orderly pencil-box failed to show anything that he wanted of hers, but the neatly prepared home lesson which fluttered out of her arithmetic caught his eye. He agreed to make her the teeth for a copy of six problems which he could not solve. Mary had much the hardest part of the bargain, for, sitting on the stile, she patiently copied long-division sums until the second bell rang, while he turned off the teeth with a few masterful strokes of his knife.

" Let's all put them in as soon as we're done singing, and wear them till we recite spelling," he suggested. " It's mighty hard to keep from chawin' on 'em after they've been in your mouth awhile. Let's see who can keep them in longest. Every five minutes by the clock, if the teacher isn't lookin', we'll all grin at onct to show that they're still in."

Needless to say, the usual Friday morning studiousness did not prevail in the primary room that morning. Too many eyes were watching the clock for the moment of display to arrive, and when it did arrive, the coughing and choking that was set up to hide the titters, plainly told the teacher that some mischief was afoot. If she could have turned in time to see the distorted faces, she must have laughed too, it was such a comical sight, but she was trying to explain to a row of stupid little mathematicians the mysteries of borrowing in subtraction, and always looked up a moment too late.

Mary Ware, having written every word of her spelling lesson from memory, and compared it with her book to be sure that she knew it, now had a quarter of an hour of leisure. This she devoted to putting her desk in order. The books were dusted and piled in neat rows. Everything in her pencil-box was examined, and laid back with care, the slate-rag folded and tucked under the moist sponge. There was another box in her desk. It had bunches of violets on it and strips of lace-paper lining the sides. It smelled faintly of the violet soap it had once held. She kept several conveniences in this, pins, and an extra hair-ribbon in case of loss, a comb, and a little round mirror with a celluloid back, on which was printed the advertisement of a Plainsville druggist.

As she polished the little mirror, the temptation to use it was too great to resist. Holding it under the desk, she stretched her lips back as far as possible in a grotesque grin, to show her set of turnip teeth. They looked so funny that she tried it again with variations, rolling her eyes and wrinkling her nose. So absorbed was she that she did not realize that a silence had fallen in the room, that the recitation had stopped and all eyes were turned upon her. Then her own name, spoken in a stern tone, startled her so that she bounced in her seat and dropped the mirror.

"Why, *Mary Ware!* I'm *astonished!* Come here!"

Blushing and embarrassed at being called into public notice, Mary stumbled up to the platform, and submitted to an examination of her mouth. Then, following orders, she went to the door, and with much sputtering spat the teeth out into the yard.

"I'll see you about this after school," remarked the teacher, sternly, as she stumbled back to her seat, overcome by mortification.

If the teacher had not been so busy watching Mary obey orders, she would have noticed a rapid moving of many jaws along the back row of seats, and a mighty gulping and swallowing, as the other sets of teeth disappeared down the throats of their owners.

"So this has been the cause of so much disturbance this morning," she remarked, crossly.

"I'm astonished that one of the quietest pupils in the school should have behaved in such a manner." Then as a precaution she added, "Is there any one else in the room who has any of these turnip teeth? Raise your hands if you have."

Not a hand went up, and every face met Mary's indignant accusing gaze with such an innocent stare that she cried out:

"Oh, what a story!"

"Open your mouths," commanded the teacher. "Turn your pockets wrong side out."

To Mary's amazement, nobody had so much as a taste of turnip to show, and she stood accused of being the only offender, the only one with judgment awaiting her after school. With her head on her desk, and her face hidden on her arms, she cried softly all through the spelling recitation. "It wasn't fair," she sobbed to herself.

Patty comforted her at recess with half her stick of licorice, and several of the other girls crowded around her, begging her to come and play Bird, and not to mind what the boys said, and not to look around when Wig Smith mimicked the teacher's manner, and called after her in a tantalizing tone, "Why, Mary Ware! I'm *astonished!*"

Gradually they won her away from her tears, and before recess was over she was shrieking with the gayest of them as they raced around the schoolhouse to escape the girl who, being " It," personated the " bad man."

As they dropped into their seats at the close of recess, hot and panting, a boy from the grammar room came in and spoke to the teacher. It was Paul Archer, a boy from New York, whose father had recently bought a ranch near by. He held up a string of amber beads, as the teacher asked, " Does this belong to any one in this room? "

They were beautiful beads. Mary caught her breath as she looked at them. " Like drops of rain strung on a sunbeam," she thought, watching them sparkle as he turned and twisted the string. Paul was a big boy, very clean and very good-looking, and as little Blanche Ellert came up to claim her necklace, blushing and shaking back her curls, he held it out with such a polite, dancing-school bow that Mary's romantic little soul was greatly impressed. She wished that the beautiful beads had been hers, and that she had lost them, and could have claimed them before the whole school, and had them surrendered to her in that princely way. She would like to lose a ring, she thought, that is, if she had one, or a locket, and have Paul find it, and give it to her before the whole school.

Then she remembered that she had worn her best jacket to school that morning, and in the pocket was a handkerchief that had been hung on the Sunday-school Christmas-tree for her in Plainsville. It was a little white silk one, embroidered in the corners with sprays of forget-me-nots, blue, with tiny pink buds. What if she should lose that and Paul should find it, and hold up the pretty thing in sight of all the school for her to claim?

As the morning wore on, the thought pleased her more and more. The primary grades were dismissed first at noon, so she had time to slip the handkerchief from her jacket-pocket, tiptoe guiltily into the other cloak-room, and drop it under a certain wide-brimmed felt hat, which hung on its peg with a jauntier grace than the other caps and sombreros could boast. It seemed to stare at her in surprise. Half-frightened by her own daring, she tiptoed out again, and ran after Patty, who was hunting for her outside.

" There won't be any salt in our cake and pepper in our pie to-day," Patty said, confidently, as they strolled off together with their arms around each other. " Let's get our baskets, and go away off out of sight to eat our dinners. I know the nicest place down by the lateral under some cottonwood-trees. The water is running to-day."

"It'll be like having a picnic beside a babbling brook," assented Mary. "I love to hear the water gurgle through the water-gate."

Seated on a freshly hewn log, after a careful survey had convinced them that no lizards, Gila monsters, or horned toads lurked underneath, the little girls opened their baskets, and shook out their napkins. The next instant a wail rose from them in unison:

"Ants! Nasty little black ants! They're over everything!"

"Just look at my chicken sandwiches," mourned Mary, "and all that lovely gingerbread. They're walking all over it and through it and into it and around it. There isn't a spot that they haven't touched!"

"And my mince turnovers," cried Patty. "I brought one for you to-day, too, and a devilled egg. But there isn't a thing in my basket that's fit to eat."

"Nor mine, either," said Mary, "except the apples. We might wash them in the lateral."

"And I'm nearly starved, I'm so hungry," grumbled Patty. "An apple's better than nothing, but it doesn't go very far."

"It's no use to go and ask Holland for any of his lunch," said Mary. "By this time he's gobbled up even the scraps, and busted the bag. He always brings his in a paper bag, so's there'll be no basket to carry home."

Cautiously leaning over the bank of the lateral, Mary began dabbling her apple back and forth in the water, and Patty, kneeling beside her, followed her example. Suddenly Patty's apple slipped out of her hand, and she clutched frantically at Mary's arm in her effort to save it, and at the same time keep her balance. Both swayed and fell sideways. Mary's arm plunged into the water, wetting her sleeve nearly to her shoulder, but, clawing at the earth and long grass with the other hand, she managed, after much scrambling, to regain her position.

Patty, with a scream, rolled over into the water. The ditch was shallow, not more than waist-deep, but as she had fallen full length, she came up soaking wet. Even her hair dripped muddy little rivers down over her face. There was no more school for Patty that day. As soon as her old yellow horse could be saddled, she started off on a lope toward dry clothes and a hot dinner.

Mary looked after her longingly, as she sat with her sleeve held out in the sun to dry, and slowly munched her one cold apple. She was so hungry and miserable that she wanted to cry, yet this child of nine was a philosopher in her small way.

"I'm not having half as bad a time as the old vicar had," she said to herself, "so I won't be a baby. Seems to me, though, that it's about time fortune was changing in my favour. Maybe the turn will be when Paul finds my forget-me-not handkerchief."

With that time in view, she carefully smoothed the wrinkles out of her sleeve as it dried, and pulled the lace edging into shape around the cuff. Then she combed the front of her hair, and retied the big bows. She was not equal to the task of braiding it herself, but a glance into the little celluloid mirror satisfied her that she looked neat enough to march up before the school when the time should come for her to claim her handkerchief.

Every time the door opened before the afternoon recess she looked up expectantly, her cheeks growing red and her heart beating fast. But no Paul appeared, or anybody else who had found anything to be restored to its owner. She began to feel anxious, and to wonder if she would ever see her beloved forget-me-not handkerchief again.

At recess she dodged back into the hall after every one had passed out, and stole a quick glance into the other cloak-room. The handkerchief was gone. Somebody had picked it up. Maybe the finder had been too busy to search for the owner. It would be brought in before school closed; just before dismissal probably. The prospect took part of the sting out of the recollection that she was to be kept after school that evening, for the first time in her life.

During the last period in the afternoon, the A Geography class always studied its lesson for next day. Mary specially liked this study, and with her little primary geography propped up in front of her, carefully learned every word of description, both large print and small, on the page devoted to Africa.

"Your hair is coming undone," whispered the girl behind her. "Let me plait it for you. I love to fool with anybody's hair."

Mary nodded her consent without turning around, and sat up straight in her seat, so that Jennie could reach it with greater ease. She never took her eyes from the page. The teacher, who was putting

"SHE PROCEEDED WITH A JOYFUL HEART TO PAINT THE AFRICAN LION"

home lessons on the board for the D Arithmetic to copy, was too busy to notice Jennie's new occupation.

Mary enjoyed the soft touch of Jennie's fingers on her hair. It felt so good to have it pulled into place with smooth, deft pats here and there. After the bows were tied on, Jennie still continued to play with it, braiding the ends below the ribbon into plaits that grew thinner and thinner, until they ended in points as fine and soft as a camel's-hair paint-brush. Evidently they suggested brushes to Jennie, for presently she dived into her desk for something quite foreign to school work. It was a little palette-shaped card on which were arranged seven cakes of cheap water-colour paint. The brush attached to the palette had been lost on Christmas Day, before she had had more than one trial of her skill as an artist.

The water-bottle, which held the soap-suds devoted to slate-cleaning, stood behind the pile of books in her desk. She drew that out, and, having uncorked it, carefully dipped the end of one of Mary's braids into it. Then rubbing it across the cake of red paint, she proceeded with a joyful heart to paint the African lion in her geography the most brilliant red that can be imagined.

Mary, still enjoying the gentle pull, little guessed what a bloody tip swung behind her right shoulder. Then the caressing touch was transferred to the left braid, and the greenest of green Bedouins, mounted on the most purple of camels, appeared on the picture of the Sahara.

The signal for dismissal, sounding from the principal's room across the hall, surprised both the girls. The time had passed so rapidly. Mary, putting her hand back to feel if her bows were properly tied, suddenly jerked her right braid forward in alarm. The end was wet, and — was it *blood* that made it so red? With a horrified expression she clutched the other one, and finding that wet and green, turned squarely around in her seat. She was just in time to see the geography closing on the red lion and green Bedouin, and realized in a flash how Jennie had been " fooling " with her hair.

Before she could sputter out her indignation, the teacher rapped sharply on the table for attention. " Will you *please* come to order, Mary Ware? " she said, sternly. " Remember, you are to remain after the others are dismissed."

To have been publicly reprimanded twice in one day, to have been kept after school, to have had one's lunch spoiled by ants, and to have been left miserably hungry all afternoon, to have had the shock of a plunge almost to the shoulder in icy water, and the discomfort of having a wet sleeve dried on one's arm, to have had one's hair used as paint-brushes, so that stains were left on the back of the new gingham dress, was too much. Mary could keep inflexible no longer. Then she remembered that no one had brought back the forget-me-not handkerchief, and with that to cap her woes, she laid her head down on the desk and sobbed while the others filed out and left her.

Usually, Holland found her waiting for him by the stile when the grammar grades were dismissed, but not seeing her there, he forgot all about her, and dashed on after the boy who tagged him. Then he and George Lee hurried on home to set a new gopher-trap they had invented, without giving her a thought. The faithful Patty, who always walked with her as far as the turn, had not come back to school after her plunge into the lateral. So it came about that when Mary finally put on her hat and jacket in the empty cloak-room, the playground was deserted. As far as her tear-swollen eyes could see up and down the road, not a child was in sight. With a sob, she stood a moment on the top step of the stile, then slowly swinging her lunch-basket, in which there were no scraps as usual to appease her after-school hunger, she started on the long, two-mile walk home.

It looked later than it really was, for the sun was not shining. She had gone on a long way, when a sound of hoofs far down the road made her look back. What she saw made her give another startled glance over her shoulder, and quicken her pace. Half-running, she looked back again. The sound was coming nearer. So was the rider. Another glance made her stand still, her knees shaking under her; for on the pony was an Indian, a big, stolid buck, with black hair hanging in straight locks over his shoulders.

She looked wildly around. Nobody else was in sight, no house anywhere. The biggest man-eating tiger in the jungles could not have terrified her like the sight of that lone Indian. All the tales that Jack and Holland had told for their mutual frightening, all that she had read herself of tortures and cruelties came into her mind. Their name was legion, and they were startlingly fresh in her memory, for only the evening before she had finished a book called "On the Borders with Crook," and the capture of the Oatman girls had been repeated in her dreams.

Sure that the Indian intended to tomahawk her the instant he reached her, she gave one stifled gasp of terror, and started down the road as fast as her fat little legs could carry her. A few rods farther on her hat flew off, but she was running for her life, and even the handsome steel buckle that had once been Cousin Kate's could not be rescued at such a risk.

She felt that she was running in a treadmill. Her legs were going up and down, up and down, faster than they had ever moved before, but she seemed to be making no progress; she was unable to get past that one spot in the road. And the Indian was coming on nearer and nearer, with deadly certainty, gaining on her at every breath. She felt that she had been running for a week, that she could not possibly take another step. But with one more frantic glance backward, she gave another scream, and dashed on harder than before.

CHAPTER IV.

WARE'S WIGWAM

Phil Tremont, driving out from Phœnix in a high, red-wheeled cart, paused at the cross-roads, uncertain whether to turn there or keep on to the next section-line. According to part of the directions given him, this was the turning-place. Still, he had not yet come in sight of Camelback Mountain, which was to serve as a guide-post. Not a house was near at which he might inquire, and not a living thing in sight except a jack-rabbit, which started up from the roadside, and bounded away at his approach.

Then he caught sight of the little whirl of dust surrounding Mary in her terrified flight, and touched his horse with the whip. In a moment he was alongside of the breathless, bareheaded child.

"Little girl," he called, "can you tell me if this is the road to Lee's ranch?" Then, as she turned a dirty, tear-stained face, he exclaimed, in amazement, "Of all people under the sun! The little vicar! Well, you *are* a sprinter! What are you racing with?"

Mary sank down on the road, so exhausted by her long run that she breathed in quick, gasping sobs. Her relief at seeing a white face instead of a red one was so great that she had no room for surprise in her little brain that the face should be Phil Tremont's, who was supposed to be far away in California. She recognized him instantly, although he no longer wore his uniform, and the broad-brimmed hat he wore suggested the cowboy of the plains rather than the cadet of the military school.

"What are you racing with?" he repeated, laughingly. "That jack-rabbit that passed me down yonder?"

"A — a — a *Indian!*" she managed to gasp. "He chased me — all the way — from the schoolhouse!"

"An Indian!" repeated Phil, standing up in the cart to look back down the road. "Oh, it must have been that old fellow I passed half a mile back. He was an ugly-looking specimen, but he couldn't have chased you; his pony was so stiff and old it couldn't go out of a walk."

"He *was* a-chasing me!" insisted Mary, the tears beginning to roll down her face again. She looked so little and forlorn, sitting there in a heap beside the road, that Phil sprang from the cart, and picked her up in his strong arms.

"There," said he, lifting her into the cart. "'Weep no more, my lady, weep no more to-day!' Fortune has at last changed in your favour. You are snatched from the bloody scalper of the plains, and shall be driven home in style by your brave rescuer, if you'll only tell me which way to go."

The tear-stained little face was one broad smile as Mary leaned back in the seat. She pointed up the road to a clump of umbrella-trees. "That's where we turn," she said. "When you come to the trees you'll see there's a little house behind them. It's the White Bachelor's. We call him that because his horse and dog and cows and cats and chickens are all white. That's how I first remembered where to turn on my way home, by the place where there's so awful many white chickens. I was hoping to get to his place before I died of running, when you came along. You saved my life, didn't you? I never had my life saved before. Wasn't it strange the way you happened by at exactly the right moment? It's just as if we were in a book. I thought you were away off in California at school. How *did* it happen anyway?" she asked, peering up at him under his broad-brimmed hat.

A dull red flushed his face an instant, then he answered, lightly, "Oh, I thought I'd take a vacation. I got tired of school, and I've started out to see the world. I remembered what your brother said about the quail-shooting out here, and the ducks, so I thought I'd try it a few weeks, and then go on somewhere else. I've always wanted a taste of ranch life and camping."

"I'm tired of school, too," said Mary, "specially after all the terrible unpleasant things that have happened to-day. But my family won't let me stop, not if I begged all night and all day. How did you get yours to?"

"Didn't ask 'em," said Phil, grimly. "Just chucked it, and came away."

"But didn't your father say anything at all? Didn't he care?"

The red came up again in the boy's face. "He doesn't know anything about it — yet; he's in Europe, you know."

They had reached the White Bachelor's now, and turning, took the road that ran like a narrow ribbon between the irrigated country and the desert. On one side were the wastes of sand between the red buttes and old Camelback Mountain, on the other were the green ranches with their rows of figs and willows and palms, bordering all the waterways.

" Now we're just half a mile from Lee's ranch," said Mary. " We'll be there in no time."

" Do you suppose they'll have room for me?" inquired Phil. " That's what I've come out for, to engage board."

" Oh, I'm sure they will, anyhow, after to-morrow, for we're going to move then, and that'll leave three empty tents. We've rented a place half a mile farther up the road, and Jack and Joyce are having more fun fixing it up. That's one reason I want to stop school. I'm missing all the good times."

" Hello! This seems to be quite a good-sized camp!" exclaimed Phil, as they came in sight of an adobe house, around which clustered a group of twenty or more tents, like a brood of white chickens around a motherly old brown hen. " There comes Mrs. Lee now," cried Mary, as a tall, black-haired woman came out of the house, and started across to one of the tents with a tray in her hands. Her pink dress fluttered behind her as she moved forward, with a firm, light tread, suggestive of buoyant spirits and unbounded cheerfulness.

"She's doing something for somebody all the time," remarked Mary. "If you were sick she'd nurse you as if she was your mother, but as long as you're not sick, maybe she won't let you come. Oh, I never thought about that. This is a camp for invalids, you know, and she is so interested in helping sick people get well, that maybe she won't take any interest in you. Have you got a letter from anybody? Oh, I do hope you have!"

"A letter," repeated Phil. "What kind?"

"A letter to say that you're all right, you know, from somebody that knows you. I heard her tell Doctor Adams last week that she wouldn't take anybody else unless she had a letter of — of something or other, I can't remember, because one man went off without paying his board. *We* had a letter from her brother."

"No, I haven't any letter of recommendation or introduction, if that's what you mean," said Phil, "but maybe I can fix it up all right with her. Can't you say a good word for me?"

"Of course," answered Mary, taking his question in all seriousness. "And I'll run and get mamma, too. She'll make it all right."

Springing out, Phil lifted her over the wheel, and then stood flicking the dry Bermuda grass with his whip, as he waited for Mary to announce his coming. He could hear her shrill little voice in the tent, whither she had followed Mrs. Lee to tell her of his arrival.

"It's the Mr. Phil Tremont we met on the train," he heard her say. "Don't you know, the one I told you about running away with his little sister and the monkey and the music-box one time. He isn't sick, but he wants to stay here awhile, and I told him you'd be good to him, anyhow."

Then she hurried away to her mother's tent, and Mrs. Lee came out laughing. There was something so genial and friendly in the humourous twinkle of her eyes, something so frank and breezy in her hospitable Western welcome, that Phil met her with the same outspoken frankness.

"I heard what Mary said," he began, "and I do hope you'll take me in, for I've run away again, Mrs. Lee." Then his handsome face sobered, and he said, in his straightforward, boyish way that Mrs. Lee found very attractive, "I got into a scrape at the military school. It wasn't anything wicked, but four of us were fired. The other fellows' fathers got them taken back, but mine is in Europe, and it's so unsatisfactory making explanations at that long range, and I thought they hadn't been altogether fair in the matter, so I — well, I just skipped out. Mary said I'd have to have references. I can't give you any now, but I can pay in advance for a month's board, if you'll take me that way."

He pulled out such a large roll of bills as he spoke, that Mrs. Lee looked at him keenly. All sorts of people had drifted to her ranch, but never before a schoolboy of seventeen with so much money in his pocket. He caught the glance, and something in the motherly concern that seemed to cross her face made him say, hastily, "Father left an emergency fund for my sister and me when he went away, besides our monthly allowance, and I drew on mine before I came out here."

While they were discussing prices, Mrs. Ware came out with a cordial greeting. Mary's excited tale of her rescue had almost led her to believe that Phil had snatched her little daughter from an Indian's tomahawk. She was heartily glad to see him, for the few hours' acquaintance on the train had given her a strong interest in the motherless boy and girl, and she had thought of them many times since then. Phil felt that in coming back to the Wares he was coming back to old friends.

After it was settled that he might send his trunk out next day, when a tent would be vacant, he sat for a long time talking to Mrs. Ware and Mary, in the rustic arbour covered with bamboo and palm leaves.

Chris was calling the cows to the milking when he finally rose to go, and only rapid driving would take him back to Phœnix before nightfall. As the red wheels disappeared down the road, Mary exclaimed, " This has certainly been the most exciting day of my life! It has been so full of unexpected things. Isn't it grand to think that Mr. Phil is coming to the ranch? Fortune certainly changed in my favour when he happened along just in time to save my life. Oh, dear, there come Joyce and Jack! They've just missed him!"

Saturday afternoon found the new home all ready for its occupants. Even the trunks had been brought up from the ranch and stowed away in the tents. Although it was only two o'clock, the table was already set for tea in one corner of the clean, fresh kitchen, behind a tall screen.

Joyce, with her blue calico sleeves tucked up above her white elbows, whistled softly as she tied on a clean apron before beginning her baking. She had not been as happy in months. The hard week's work had turned the bare adobe house into a comfortable little home, and she could hardly wait for her mother to see it. Mrs. Lee was to bring her and Norman over in the surrey. Any moment they might come driving up the road.

Jack had offered to stay if his services were needed further, but she had sent him away to take his well-earned holiday. As he tramped off with his gun over his shoulder, her voice followed him pleasantly: "Good luck to you, Jack. You deserve it, for you've stuck by me like a man this week."

Since dinner Mary and Holland had swept the yard, brought wood for the camp-fire, filled the boiler and the pitchers in the tents, and then gone off, as Joyce supposed, to rest under the cottonwood-trees. Presently she heard Mary tiptoeing into the sitting-room, and peeped in to find her standing in the middle of the floor, with her hands clasped behind her.

"Isn't it sweet and homey!" Mary exclaimed. "I'm so glad to see the old furniture again I could just hug it! I came in to get the book about Hiawatha, sister. Holland keeps teasing me 'cause I said I wished I was named Minnehaha, and says

I am Mary-ha-ha. And I want to find a name for him, a real ugly one!"

"Call him Pau-Puk-Keewis, — mischief-maker," suggested Joyce. "There's the book on the second shelf of the bookcase." She stepped into the room to slip the soft silk curtain farther down the brass rod.

"I'm prouder of this bookcase than almost anything else we have," she said. "Nobody would guess that it was made of the packing-boxes that the goods came in, and that this lovely Persian silk curtain was once the lining of one of Cousin Kate's party dresses."

"I'm glad that everything looks so nice," said Mary, "for Mr. Phil said he was coming up to see us this evening. I'm going to put on a clean dress and my best hair-ribbons before then."

"Very well," assented Joyce, going back to the kitchen. "I'll change my dress, too," she thought, as she went on with her work. "And I'll light both lamps. The Indian rugs and blankets make the room look so bright and cosy by lamplight."

It had been so long since she had seen any one but the family and the invalids at the ranch, that the thought of talking to the jolly young cadet added another pleasure to her happy day.

"Oh, Joyce," called Holland, from behind the tents, "may we have the paint that is left in the cans? There's only a little in each one."

"I don't care," she called back. That had been an hour ago, and now, as she broke the eggs for a cake into a big platter, and began beating them with a fork, she wondered what they were doing that kept them so quiet. As the fork clacked noisily back and forth in the dish and the white foam rose high and stiff, her whistling grew louder. It seemed to fill all the sunny afternoon silence with its trills, for Joyce's whistle was as clear and strong as any boy's or any bird's. But suddenly, as it reached its highest notes, it stopped short. Joyce looked up as a shadow fell across the floor, to see Jack coming in the back door with Phil Tremont.

She had not heard the sound of their coming, for the noise of her egg-beating and her whistling. Joyce blushed to the roots of her hair, at being taken thus unawares, whistling like a boy over her cake-baking. For an instant she wanted to shake Jack for bringing this stranger to the kitchen door.

"We just stopped by for a drink," Jack explained. "Tremont was coming out of the ranch with his gun when I passed with mine, so we've been hunting together. Come in, Phil, I'll get a cup."

There was such a mischievous twinkle in Phil's eyes as he greeted her, that Joyce blushed again. This was a very different meeting from the one she had anticipated. Instead of him finding her, appearing to her best advantage in a pretty white dress, sitting in the lamplight with a book in her hands, perhaps, he had caught her in her old blue calico, her sleeves rolled up, and a streak of flour across her bare arm. She rubbed it hastily across her apron, and gathered up the egg-shells in embarrassed silence.

"Did you tell those kids that they might paint up the premises the way they are doing?" demanded Jack.

"What way?" asked Joyce, in surprise.

"Haven't you seen what they've done to the front of the house? They haven't waited for your name contest, but have fixed up things to suit themselves. You just ought to come out and look!"

Phil followed as they hurried around to the front of the house, then stood smiling at the look of blank amazement which slowly spread over Joyce's face. Down one of the rough cottonwood posts, which supported the palm and bamboo thatch of their

Robinson Crusoe porch, was painted in big, straggling, bloody letters: "W-A-R-E-S W-I-G-W-A-M." Joyce groaned. She had made such an attempt to convert the rude shade into an attractive spot, spreading a Navajo blanket over her mother's camp-chair, and putting cushions on the rustic bench to make a restful place, where one could read or watch the shadows grow long across the desert. She had even brought out a little wicker tea-table this afternoon, with a vase of flowers on it, and leaned her mother's old guitar against it to give a final civilizing touch to the picture. But the effect was sadly marred by the freshly painted name, glaring at her from the post.

"Oh, the little savages!" she exclaimed. "How could they do it? Ware's Wigwam, indeed!"

Then her gaze followed Jack's finger pointing to the tents pitched under the cottonwood-trees. The one which she was to share with Mary and her mother stood white and clean, the screen-door open, showing the white beds within, the rug on the floor, the flowers on the table; but the large, circular one, which the boys were to occupy, was a sight to make any one pause, open-mouthed.

Perched beside it on a scaffolding of boxes and barrels stood Holland, with a paint-can in one hand

and a brush in the other, putting the finishing touches to some startling decorations. Mary, on the other side, was brandishing another brush, and both were so intent on their work that neither looked up. Joyce gave a gasp. Never had she seen such amazing hieroglyphics as those which chased each other in zigzag green lines around the fly of the tent. They bore a general resemblance to those seen on Indian baskets and blankets and pottery, but nothing so grotesque had ever flaunted across her sight before.

"Now, get the book," called Holland to Mary, "and see if we've left anything out." Only Mary's back was visible to the amused spectators. She took up the copy of "Hiawatha" from the barrel where it lay, careful to keep the hem of her apron between it and her paint-bedaubed thumbs.

"I think we've painted every single figure he wrote about," said Mary. "Now, I'll read, and you walk around and see if we've left anything out:

"Very spacious was the wigwam
With the gods of the Dacotahs
Drawn and painted on the curtains."

"No, skip that," ordered Holland. "It's farther down." Mary's paint-smeared fingers travelled slowly down the page, then she began again:

"Sun and moon and stars he painted,
Man and beast and fish and reptile.

"Figures of the Bear and Reindeer,
Of the Turtle, Crane, and Beaver.

"Owl and Eagle, Crane and Hen-hawk,
And the Cormorant, bird of magic.

"Figures mystical and awful,
Figures strange and brightly coloured."

"They're all here," announced Holland, "specially the figures mystical and awful. I'll have to label mine, or somebody will take my turtle for a grizzly."

"Oh, the little savages!" exclaimed Joyce again. "How could they make such a spectacle of the place! We'll be the laughing-stock of the whole country."

"I don't suppose that'll ever come off the tent, but we can paint the name off the post," said Jack.

"Oh, that's a fine name," said Phil, laughing, "leave it on. It's so much more original than most people have."

Before Joyce could answer, the rattle of wheels announced the coming of the surrey, and Mrs. Lee drove into the yard with Mrs. Ware and Norman, and her own little daughter, Hazel. Then Joyce's anger, which had burned to give Holland and Mary a good shaking, vanished completely at sight of her mother's amusement. Mrs. Ware had not laughed so heartily in months as she did at the ridiculous figures grinning from the tent. It seemed so good to see her like her old cheerful self again that, when she laughingly declared that the name straggling down the post exactly suited the place, and was far more appropriate than Bide-a-wee or Alamo, Joyce's frown entirely disappeared. Mrs. Lee caught up the old guitar, and began a rattling parody of " John Brown had a little Indian," changing the words to a ridiculous rhyme about *" The* Wares had a little Wigwam."

Mrs. Ware sat down to try the new rustic seat, and then jumped up like a girl again to look at the view of the mountains from the camp-chair, and then led the way, laughing and talking, to investigate the new home. She was as pleased as a child, and her pleasure made a festive occasion of the home-coming, which Joyce had feared at first would be a sorry one.

Phil shouldered his gun ready to start off again, feeling that he ought not to intrude, but Jack had worked too hard to miss the reward of hearing his mother's pleased exclamations and seeing her face light up over every little surprise they had prepared for her comfort. "Come and see, too," he urged so cordially that Phil fell into line, poking into all the corners, inspecting all the little shelves and cupboards, and admiring all the little makeshifts as heartily as Mrs. Lee or Mrs. Ware.

They went through the tents first, then the kitchen, and last into the living-room, of which Joyce was justly proud. There was only the old furniture they had had in Plainsville, with the books and pictures, but it was restful and homelike and really artistic, Phil acknowledged to himself, looking around in surprise.

"Here's the Little Colonel's corner," said Mary, leading him to a group of large photographs framed in passe-partout. "You know mamma used to live in Kentucky, and once Joyce went back there to a house-party. Here's the place, Locust. That's where the Little Colonel lives. Her right name is Lloyd Sherman. And there she is on her pony, Tar Baby, and there's her grandfather at the gate."

Phil stooped for a closer view of the photograph, and then straightened up, with a look of dawning recognition in his face.

"Why, I've seen her," he said, slowly. "I've been past that place. Once, several years ago, I was going from Cincinnati to Louisville with father, and something happened that we stopped on a switch in front of a place that looked just like that. And the brakeman said it was called Locust. I was out on the rear platform. I believe we were waiting for an express train to pass us, or something of the sort. At any rate, I saw that same old gentleman, — he had only one arm and was all dressed in white. Everybody was saying what a picture he made. The locusts were in bloom, you know. And while he stood there, the prettiest little girl came riding up on a black pony, with a magnificent St. Bernard dog following. She was all in white, too, with a spray of locust blossoms stuck in the cockade of the little black velvet Napoleon cap she wore, exactly as it is in that picture; and she held up a letter and called out: 'White pigeon wing fo' you, grandfathah deah.' I never forgot how sweet it sounded."

"Oh, that was Lloyd! That was Lloyd!" called Mary and Joyce in the same breath, and Joyce added: "She always used to call out that when she had a letter for the old Colonel, and it must have been Hero that you saw, the Red Cross war-dog that was given to her in Switzerland. How strange it seems that you should come across her picture away out here in the desert!"

Mary's eyes grew rounder and rounder as she listened. She delighted in romantic situations, and this seemed to her one of the most romantic she had ever known in real life, quite as interesting as anything she had ever read about.

"Doesn't it seem queer to think that he's seen Lloyd and Locust?" she exclaimed. "It makes him seem almost like home folks, doesn't it, mamma?"

Mrs. Ware smiled. "It certainly does, dear, and we must try to make him feel at home with us in our wild wigwam." She had seen the wistful expression of his eyes a few moments before when, catching Joyce and Jack by the arms, she had cried, proudly: "Nobody in the world has such children as mine, Mrs. Lee! Don't you think I have cause to be proud of my five little Indians, who fixed up this house so beautifully all by themselves?"

"Come back and take supper with us, won't you?" she asked, as he and Jack started on their interrupted hunt. "We'll make a sort of housewarming of our first meal together in the new wigwam, and I'll be glad to count you among my little Indians."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ware," he said, in his gentlemanly way and with the frank smile which she found so winning; "you don't know how much that means to a fellow who has been away from a real home as long as I have. I'll be the gladdest 'little Indian' in the bunch to be counted in that way."

"Then I'll get back to my cake-making," said Joyce, "if we're to have company for supper. I won't promise that it'll be a success, though, for while it bakes I'm going to write to Lloyd. I've thought for days that I ought to write, for I've owed her a letter ever since Christmas. She doesn't even know that we've left Plainsville. And I'm going to tell her about your having seen her, and recognized her picture away out here on the desert. I wish she'd come out and make us a visit."

"Here," said Phil, playfully, taking a sprig of orange blossoms from his buttonhole, and putting it in the vase on the wicker table. "When you get your letter written, put that in, as a sample of what grows out here. I picked it as we passed Clayson's ranch. If it reaches her on a cold, snowy day, it will make her want to come out to this land of sunshine. You needn't tell her I sent it."

"I'll dare you to tell," said Jack, as they started off.

Joyce's only answer was a laugh, as she went back to her egg-beating. Almost by the time the boys were out of sight, she had whisked the cake dough into a pan, and the pan into the oven, and, while Mrs. Ware and Mrs. Lee talked in the other room, she spread her paper out on the kitchen table, and began her letter to the Little Colonel.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT A LETTER BROUGHT ABOUT

LLOYDSBORO VALLEY would have seemed a strange place to Joyce, could she have followed her letter back to Kentucky. She had known it only in midsummer, when the great trees at Locust arched their leafy branches above the avenue, to make a giant arbour of green. Now these same trees stood bleak and bare in the February twilight, almost knee-deep in drifts of snow. Instead of a green lacework of vines, icicles hung between the tall white pillars of the porch, gleaming like silver where the light from the front windows streamed out upon them, and lay in far-reaching paths across the snow.

In the long drawing-room, softly lighted by many candles and the glow of a great wood fire, the Little Colonel sat on the arm of her father's chair. He had just driven up from the station, and she held his cold ears in her warm little hands, giving them a pull now and then to emphasize what she was saying.

"The first sleigh-ride of the season, Papa Jack. Think of that! We've had enough snow this wintah for any amount of coasting and sleighing if it had only lasted. That's the trouble with Kentucky snow; it melts too fast to be any fun. But to-night everything is just right, moon and all, and the sleighs are to call for us at half-past seven, and we're going for a glorious, gorgeous, grandiferous old sleigh-ride. At nine o'clock we'll stop at The Beeches for refreshments."

"Yes," chimed in Betty from the hearth-rug, where she sat leaning against her godmother's knee. "Mrs. Walton says we shall have music wherever we go, like little Jenny that 'rode a cock-horse to Banbury Cross.' She has a whole pile of horns and bells ready for us. It's lovely of her to entertain both the clubs. She's asked the *Mu Chi Sigma* from the Seminary as well as our Order of Hildegarde."

"Oh, that reminds me," exclaimed Mr. Sherman, "although I don't know why it should — I brought a letter up from the post-office for you, Lloyd." Feeling in several pockets, he at last found the big square envelope he was searching for.

"What a big fat one it is," said Lloyd, glancing at the postmark. "Phœnix, Arizona! I don't know anybody out there."

"Arizona is where our mines are located," said Mr. Sherman, watching her as she tore open the envelope.

"Oh, it's from Joyce Ware!" she cried. "See all the funny little illustrations on the edge of the papah! And heah is a note inside for you, mothah, from Mrs. Ware, and oh, what's this? How sweet!" A cluster of orange blossoms fell out into her lap, brown and bruised from the long journey, but so fragrant, that Betty, across the room, raised her head with a long indrawn breath of pleasure.

"Listen! I'll read it aloud:"

"'WARE'S WIGWAM, ARIZONA.

"'DEAREST LLOYD:—Mamma's note to your mother will explain how we happened to stray away out here, next door to nowhere, and why we are camping on the edge of the desert instead of enjoying the conveniences of civilization in Kansas.

"'The sketch at the top of the page will give you an idea of the outside of our little adobe house and the tents, so without stopping for description I'll begin right here in the kitchen, where I am sitting, waiting for a cake to bake. It's the cleanest, cosiest kitchen you ever saw, for Jack and I have been cleaning and scrubbing for days and days. It has all sorts of little shelves and cupboards and cuddy holes that we made ourselves, and the new tins shine like silver. A tall screen in the middle of the room shuts off one end for a dining-room, and the table is set for supper. To-night we are to have our first meal in the wigwam. Holland and Mary named it that, and painted the name on the porch post in big bloody letters a little while ago.

"'Through the open door I can look into the other room, which is library, studio, parlour, and living-room all in one. Everything is so spick and span that nobody would ever guess what a dreadful time we had putting on the paper and painting all the woodwork. I spilled a whole panful of cold, sticky paste on Jack's head one day. We had made a scaffolding of boxes and barrels. One end slipped and let me down. You never saw such a sight as he was. I had to scrape his hair and face with a spoon. Then so much of the paper wrinkled and would stick on crooked, but now that the pictures are hung and the furniture in place, none of the mistakes show.

" 'Jack has gone hunting with Phil Tremont, a boy staying at Lee's ranch. I am learning to shoot, too. I practised all one afternoon, and the gun kicked so bad that my shoulder is still black and blue. Phil said the loads were too heavy, and he is going to loan me his little rifle to practise with. He is such a nice boy, and, oh, Lloyd! it's the strangest thing! — he has seen *you*. I have those pictures of Locust hanging over my easel, and, when he saw the photograph of you on Tar Baby, he recognized it right away. He was on the train and saw you ride in at the gate with a letter for your grandfather, and Hero following you.

" 'I didn't get any farther than this in my letter (because I spent so much time making the illustrations) before Phil and Jack came back with some quail they had shot. They were the proudest boys you ever saw, and nothing would do but they must have those quail cooked for supper. They couldn't wait till next day. Mamma had invited Phil to take supper with us, and help make a sort of house-warming of our first meal in the new home.

" 'We had the jolliest kind of a time, and afterward he helped wipe the dishes. I told him that I was writing to you, and he took this little piece of orange blossom out of his buttonhole, and asked me if I didn't want to send it to you as a sample of what we are enjoying in this land of perpetual sunshine.

" ' It isn't a sample of everything, however. The place has lots of drawbacks. Oh, Lloyd, you can't imagine how lonesome I get sometimes. I have been here a month, and haven't met a single girl my age. If there was just one to be chums with I wouldn't mind the rest so much, — the leaving school and all that. I don't mind the work, even the washing and ironing and scrubbing, — it's just the lonesomeness, and the missing the good times we used to have at the high school.

" ' Save up your pennies, or else get a railroad pass, you and Betty, for some of these days I'm going to give a wigwam-party. It will be a far different affair from your house-party (could there ever be another such heavenly time?), but there are lots of interesting things to see out here: an ostrich farm, an Indian school and reservation, and queer old ruins to visit. There are scissors-birds and Gila monsters — I can't begin to name the things that would keep you staring. Mrs. Lee has a Japanese chef, and a Mexican to do her irrigating, and a Chinaman to bring her vegetables, and she always buys her wood of the Indians, so it seems very foreign and queer at first. There is no lack of variety, so I ought to be satisfied, and I am usually, except when I think of little old Plainsville, and the boys and girls going up and down the dear old streets to high school, and meeting in the library, and sitting on the steps singing in the moonlight, and all the jolly, sociable village life and the friends I have left behind for ever. Then it seems to me that I can hardly stand it here. I wish you and Betty were with me this very minute. *Please* write soon. With love to you both and everybody else in the family and the dear old valley,

" 'Your homesick

" 'JOYCE.' "

Mrs. Ware's letter was cheerful and uncomplaining, but there were tears in Mrs. Sherman's eyes when she finished reading it aloud.

" Poor Emily," she said. " She was always such a brave little body. I don't see how she can write such a hopeful letter under the circumstances, — an invalid sent out into the wilderness to die, maybe, with all those children. She has so much ambition to make something of them, and no way to do it. Jack, if you go out to the mines this month, as you talked of doing, I want you to arrange your trip so that you can stop and see her."

Lloyd looked up in surprise. "When are you going, Papa Jack? Isn't it queah how things happen!"

"The latter part of this month, probably. Mr. Robeson has invited me to go out with a party in his private car. He is interested in the same mines."

"I wonder —" began Mrs. Sherman, then stopped as Mom Beck came to announce dinner. "I'll talk to you about it after awhile, Jack."

Somehow both Betty and Lloyd felt that it was not the summons to dinner which interrupted her, but that she had started to speak of something which she did not care to discuss in their presence.

"Arizona has always seemed such a dreadful place to me," said Lloyd, hanging on her father's arm, as they went out to the dining-room. "I remembah when you came back from the mines. It was yeahs ago, befo' I could talk plainly. Mothah and Fritz and I went to the station to meet you. Fritz had roses stuck in his collah, and kept barking all the time as if he knew something was going to happen. You fainted when we got to the house, and were so ill that you neahly died. I heard you talk about a fiah at the mines, and evah since I've thought of Arizona as looking like the Sodom and Gomorrah in my old pictuah book — smoke and fiah sweeping across a great plain, and people running to get away from it."

"To me it's just a yellow square on a map," said Betty. "Of course, I've read about the wonderful petrified forests of agate, and the great cañon of the Colorado, but it's always seemed the last place in the world I'd ever want to visit. It's terrible for Joyce to give up everything and go out there to live."

"The Waltons were out there several years," said Mrs. Sherman. "They were at Fort Huachuca, and learned to love it dearly. Ask them about it to-night. They will tell you that Joyce is a very fortunate girl to have the opportunity of living in such a lovely and interesting country, and does not need any one's pity."

Little else was discussed all during dinner. Afterward they sat around the fire in the drawing-room, still talking of the Wares and the strange country to which they had moved, until a tooting of horns and a jingling of bells announced the coming of the sleighing party. Both the girls were into their wraps before the first sleigh reached the gate. They stood waiting by the hall window, looking out on the stretches of moon-lighted snow. What a cold, white, glistening world it was! One could hardly imagine that it had ever been warm and green.

Lloyd put her nose into the end of her muff for a whiff of the orange blossoms. She was taking Joyce's letter to show to the girls.

Betty, her eyes fixed on the stars, twinkling above the bare branches of the locust-trees, caught the fragrance also, and it fired her romantic little soul with a sudden thought.

"Lloyd," she exclaimed, "what if that orange blossom was an omen! What if Phil were the one written for you in the stars!"

"Oh, Betty! The idea!" laughed Lloyd. "You're always imagining things the way they are in books."

"But this happened just that way," persisted Betty. "His passing Locust on the train and seeing you when you were a little girl, and then finding your picture away out on the desert several years after, and sending you a token of his remembrance by a friend, and orange blossoms at that! If ever

I finish that story of Gladys and Eugene, I'm going to put something like that in it."

"Heah they come," interrupted Lloyd, as the sleighs dashed up to the door. "Come on, Papa Jack and everybody. Give us a good send-off."

She looked back after her father had helped them into the sleigh, to wave good-bye to the group on the porch. How interested they all were in her good times, she thought. Even her grandfather had come to the door, despite his rheumatism, to wish them a pleasant ride. Life was so sweet and full. How beautiful it was to be dashing down the snowy road in the moonlight! Was she too happy? Everybody else had troubles. Would something dreadful have to happen by and by, to make up for all the unclouded happiness of the present? She was not cold, but a sudden shiver passed over her. Then she took up the song with the others, a parody one of the Seminary girls had made for the occasion:

"Oh, the snow falls white on my old Kentucky home.
'Tis winter, the Valley is gay.
The moon shines bright and our hearts are all atune,
To the joy-bells jingling on our sleigh."

Down the avenue they went, past Tanglewood and Oaklea, through the little village of Rollington, on and on through the night. Songs and laughter, the jingling of bells and the sound of girlish voices floated through all the valley. It was not every winter that gave them such sport, and they enjoyed it all the more because it was rare. It was nine o'clock when the horses swung around through the wide gate at The Beeches, and stopped in front of the great porch, where hospitable lights streamed out at every window across the snow.

There was such a gabble over the steaming cups of hot chocolate and the little plates of oyster patés that Lloyd could not have read the letter if she had tried. For there were Allison and Kitty and Elise passing the bonbons around again and again, with hospitable insistence, and saying funny things and making everybody feel that "The Beeches" was the most charming place in the Valley for an entertainment of that kind. Everybody was in a gale of merriment. Miss Allison was helping to keep them so, and some of the teachers were there from the college, and two or three darkies, with banjoes and mandolins, out in the back hall, added to the general festivities by a jingling succession of old plantation melodies.

However, Lloyd managed to tell Mrs. Walton about the letter, saying: "It almost spoils my fun to-night to think of poah Joyce being away out in that dreadful lonesome country."

"Why, my dear child," cried Mrs. Walton, "some of the happiest years of my life were spent in that dreadful country, as you call it. It is a charming place. Just look around and see how I have filled my home with souvenirs of it, because I loved it so."

Lloyd's glance followed hers to the long-handled peace-pipe over the fireplace, the tomahawks that, set in mortars captured during a battle in Luzon, guarded the hearth instead of ordinary andirons, the baskets, the rugs, and the Navajo portières, and the Indian spears and pottery arranged on the walls of the stairway.

"Even that string of loco berries over Geronimo's portrait has a history," said Mrs. Walton. "Come down some day, and I'll tell you so many interesting things about Arizona that you'll want to start straight off to see it."

Her duties as hostess called her away just then, but her enthusiasm stayed with Lloyd all the rest of the evening, until she reached home and found her father and mother before the fire, still talking about the Wares and their wigwam.

"Your mother wants me to take you with me when I go to Arizona," said Mr. Sherman, drawing her to his knee. "Mr. Robeson had invited her to go, but, as long as that is out of the question, she wants to arrange for you to go in her place."

"And leave school?" gasped Lloyd.

"Yes, with Betty's help, you could easily make up lost lessons during the summer vacation. You'd help her, wouldn't you, dear?"

"Yes, indeed!" cried Betty. "I'd get them for her while she was gone, if I could."

"Oh, it's so sudden, it takes my breath away," said Lloyd, after a moment's pause. "Pinch me, Betty! Shake me! And then say it all ovah again, Papa Jack, to be suah that I'm awake!"

"Do you think you could get your clothes ready in ten days?" he asked, when he had playfully given her the shaking and pinching she had asked for.

"Oh, I don't need any new clothes," she cried. "But, Papa Jack, I'll tell you what I do want, and that's a small rifle. *Please* get me one. I used to practise with Rob's air-gun till I could shoot as straight as he could, and I got so that I could put a hole through a leaf at even longer range than he could. Christmas, when Ranald Walton was home, we all practised with his gun. It's lots of fun.

Joyce is learning to shoot, you know. *Please* let me have one, Papa Jack. I'd rather have it than a dozen new dresses."

Mr. Sherman looked at her in astonishment. "And *this* is my dainty Princess Winsome," he said at last. "I thought you were going for a nice, tame little visit. I'll be afraid now to take you. You'll want to come back on a bucking broncho, and dash through the Valley, shooting holes through the crown of people's hats, and lassoing carriage horses when you can't find any wild ones to rope. No, I can't take you now. I'm afraid of consequences."

"No, honestly, Papa Jack," laughed Lloyd, "I'll be just as civilized as anybody when I come back, if you'll only get me the rifle. I'll try to be extra civilized, just to please you."

"We'll see," was the only answer he would give, but Lloyd, who had never known him to refuse her anything, knew what that meant, and danced off to bed perfectly satisfied. She was too excited to sleep. To see Joyce again, to share the wigwam life, and make the acquaintance of Jack and Holland and Mary, who had been such interesting personages in Joyce's tales of them, to have that long trip with Papa Jack in Mr. Robeson's private car, and a month's delightful holiday, seemed too much happiness for one small person. All sorts of exciting adventures might lie ahead of her in that month.

The stars, peeping through her curtains, twinkled in friendly fashion at her, as if they were glad of her good fortune. Suddenly they made her think of Betty's words: "What if Phil should be the one written for you in the stars?" It *was* strange, his having seen her so long ago, and finding her picture in such an unexpected way. She wondered what he was like, and if they would be good friends, and if she could ever think as much of him as she did of her old playmates, Rob and Malcolm. Then she fell asleep, wishing that it was morning, so that she could send a letter to Joyce on the first mail-train, telling her that she was coming, — that in less than two weeks she would be with her at Ware's Wigwam.

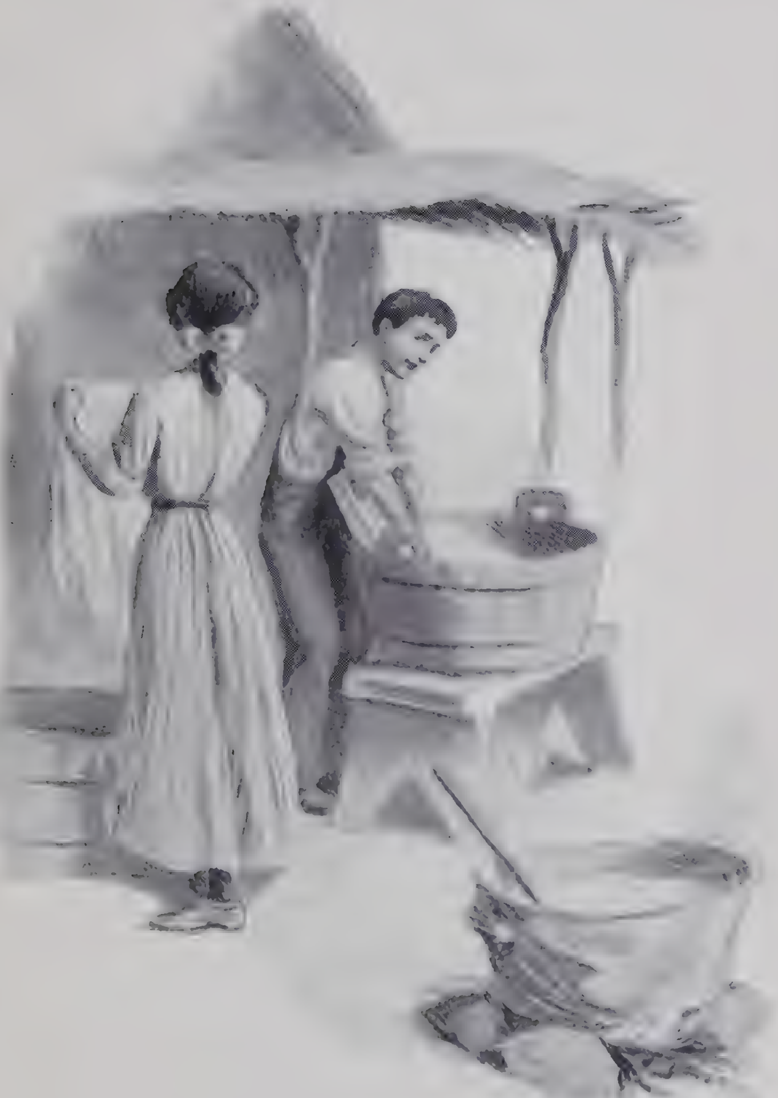
CHAPTER VI.

WASH-DAY AND WASHINGTON

It was wash-day at Ware's Wigwam; the first that Joyce and Jack had personally conducted, as it was the first Monday after moving from Lee's ranch.

Out in the back yard a big tin wash-boiler sat propped up on stones, above a glowing camp-fire. From time to time Jack stooped to poke another stick of mesquite into the blaze, or give the clothes in the boiler a stir with an old broom-handle. Then tucking up his shirt-sleeves more firmly above his elbows, he went back to the tub by the kitchen door, and, plunging his arms into the suds, began the monotonous swash and rub-a-dub of clothes and knuckles on the wash-board.

"We allee samee lak Chinamen," he said to Joyce, who was bending over another tub, rinsing and wringing. "Blimeby, when we do heap more



"'WE ALLEE SAMEE LAK CHINAMEN,' HE SAID"

washee, a cue will glow on my head. You'll be no mo' Clistian lady. You'll be lil'l heathen gel."

"I believe you're right," laughed Joyce. "I certainly felt like a heathen by the time I had finished rubbing the first basket full of clothes through the suds. The skin was off two knuckles, and my back was so tired I could scarcely straighten up again. But it won't be so bad next week. Mamma says that we may draw enough out of bank to buy a washing-machine and a wringer, and that will make the work lots easier."

A long, shrill whistle out in the road made them both stop to listen. "It's Phil," said Jack. "He said he would ride past this morning to show us the new horse he is going to buy. My! It's a beauty bright!" he exclaimed, peering around the corner of the kitchen, "Come out and look at it."

Hastily wiping the suds from his arms, and giving a hitch to the suspenders of his old overalls, he disappeared around the house. Joyce started after him, then drew back, remembering her old shoes and wet, faded gingham, as she caught sight of Phil, sitting erect as a cavalryman on the spirited black horse. From the wide brim of his soft, gray hat to the spurs on his riding-boots, he was faultlessly dressed. A new lariat hung on the horn of his saddle, the Mexican quirt he carried had mountings of silver on the handle, and the holster that held his rifle was of handsomely carved leather. While he talked to Jack, the horse stepped and pranced and tossed its head, impatient to be off.

"Come on out, Joyce, and look at it," called Phil.

"I can't," she answered, peeping around the corner of the kitchen. "I'm running a Chinese laundry back here. Jack says I'm no longer a 'Clistian lady.'"

"Do you want any help?" he called, but there was no answer. She had disappeared. Phil was disappointed. It was for her admiration more than Jack's that he had ridden by on the new horse. He was conscious that he made a good appearance in the saddle, and he had expected her to show some interest in his purchase. Usually she was so enthusiastic over everything new. The work might have waited a few minutes, he thought.

But it was not the urgency of the work that sent Joyce back to the tubs in such a hurry. It was the rebellious feeling that swept over her at the sight of his holiday appearance. She was tired and hot and bedraggled, having splashed water all over herself, and the contrast between them irritated her.

"If I have to be a Polly-put-the-kettle-on all the days of my life, I'll just *be* one," she said, in a half-whisper, giving the towel she was wringing a vicious twist. "I'm not going out there to have him feel sorry for me. He's used to seeing girls who are always dainty and fresh, like his sister Elsie, and I'm not going to let him see me looking like a poor, bedraggled Cinderella. It isn't fair that some people should have all the good things in life, and others nothing but the drudgery.

"Jack doesn't seem to mind it. There he stands out in the road in his old faded, paint-smeared overalls, and his sleeves rolled up, never caring how awkward and lanky he looks. He's taking as eager an interest in that horse's good points as if he were to have the pleasure of riding it. But then Jack hasn't the artistic temperament. He likes this wild country out here, and he never can understand what a daily sacrifice it is for me to live in such a place. My whole life is just a sacrifice to mamma and the children."

By the time the basket was full of clothes, ready to be hung on the line, Joyce had worked herself up to such a pitch of self-pity that she felt like a martyr going to the stake. She carried the basket to the sunny space behind the tents, where the line had been stretched. Here, with her sunbonnet pulled over her eyes, she could see without being seen. Phil was just riding away whistling. She watched him out of sight. The desert seemed lonelier than ever when the sound of hoof-beats and the cheery tune had passed. Her gaze wandered back to old Camelback Mountain. " We'll never get away, you and I," she whispered. " All the bright, pleasant things in life will ride by and leave us. Only the work and the waiting and the loneliness will stay."

When she went back to the house with her empty basket, Jack was rubbing away with a vigour that was putting holes in one of Holland's shirts.

" Why didn't you come out and see Phil's new horse? " he cried, enthusiastically. " He let me try him, and he goes like a bird. And say, Joyce, he knows where I could get the best kind of an Indian pony for almost nothing, at a camp near Scottsdale. It is good size, and it's broke either to the saddle or buggy, and the people will sell it for only ten dollars. Just think of that. It's almost giving it away. The man who had it died, and his wife couldn't take it back East with her, and she told them to sell it for anything they could get. Don't you think we could manage in some way to get it, Joyce?"

"Why, Jack Ware! What can you be thinking of!" she cried. "For us to spend ten dollars on a horse that we don't need would be just as great an extravagance as for some people to spend ten hundred. Don't you know that we can only buy things that we absolutely have to eat or to wear? You've surely heard it dinned into your ears long enough to get some such idea into your head."

"We don't absolutely have to have a washing-machine and wringer," he declared, nettled by Joyce's unusual tone. "A horse would be lots more use. We could have it to bring wood up with from the desert when we've burned all that's close by. And we can't go on all year borrowing a horse from Mrs. Lee every time we want to go to town, or have to have a new supply of groceries."

"But you know well enough that mamma's teaching Hazel, after awhile when she gets well enough, will more than make up for the borrowing we will do," answered Joyce. "Besides it would only be the beginning of a lot of expense. There'd be feed and a saddle to start with."

"No, there wouldn't! There's all that alfalfa pasture going to waste behind the house, and Mrs.

Lee has a saddle hanging up in her attic that somebody left on a board bill. She said I might use it as often as I pleased."

"Well, we can't afford to spend ten dollars on any such foolishness," said Joyce, shortly. "So that is the end of it."

"No, it isn't the end of it," was the spirited answer. "I've set my heart on having that pony, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take the place of the washing-machine and wringer. You give me the five dollars they would cost, and I'll do every bit of the rubbing and wringing every Monday morning. I'll borrow the other five dollars, and give a mortgage on the pony. I'll find some way to earn enough to pay it off before the summer is over."

Joyce shook her head. "No, a mortgage makes a slave of anybody foolish enough to chain himself up with one, Grandpa Ware always used to say. I'm running the finances now, and I won't give my consent. I think it is best to get the machine, and I don't intend to change my mind. You may get a position next fall, and then I'd be left to do the work without any machine to help. Besides, you sha'n't run in debt to get something that nobody really needs."

"I do need it," insisted Jack, "and I don't see why, when you are only a year older than I am, that you should have the say-so about the way all the money is to be spent."

"Because mamma wishes me to. Don't you see that the very fact of your wanting to be extravagant in this case, and go in debt and load yourself down with a mortgage shows that I have better judgment than you?"

"Oh, you've got a great head for business!" sneered Jack. "Don't you see that it wouldn't be the same as buying something to eat up or wear out? It's an investment. You put the money into the pony instead of the bank, and any time you want to get it out, you just sell the beast. I might be able to get twice as much for him next fall when the tourists begin to come into Phœnix for the winter."

"Yes, you might, but it would be more like Ware luck for it to cut itself all to pieces on the barb-wire fences before then, or break its legs stumbling into a gopher hole, or founder itself by getting into a neighbour's oat-bin. Something would be sure to happen. The money is safe where it is, and I believe in letting well enough alone."

"Banks bust sometimes, too," said Jack, moodily, "and *I* believe that 'nothing venture, nothing have.'"

It was the first quarrel they had had in months. Each, feeling firmly convinced of being in the right, grew indignant with the other, and they passed from teasing banter to angry words, and then to an angrier silence. "It won't be any harder for him to give up what he had set his heart on than it is for me," thought Joyce, as she hung up the last garment. "I have to do without things I want all the time. And I'm not going to let him think that I'll give in if he teases long enough. I wouldn't have any authority at all over the children if I wasn't firm with them."

As Jack emptied the last tubful of water, and stood the wash-board up to dry, he broke the angry silence that had lasted fully ten minutes.

"Holland has a dollar in his savings-bank, and Mary has seventy-five cents. We could all chip in with what we have, and then go without butter or something for awhile till we'd saved enough."

Joyce only gave an impatient shrug as she replied: "Much comfort we'd get out of a horse that everybody had a share in. If Holland felt that he'd sunk a dollar and several pounds of butter in that pony, he'd feel privileged to ride it any hour of the day or night, no matter who wanted it, and he'd do it, too. You might as well give it up, Jack. It is selfish of you to insist on spending so much on just your own pleasure."

"Selfish!" blazed Jack. "It's *you* that's selfish, wanting to be so bossy and have everything just your way. I haven't asked *you* to do without anything, have I, or to put in any of *your* money? And if I do the work of the washing-machine and wringer, I don't see why I shouldn't have what they would cost, to do what I please with. *You're* the selfish one!"

He banged the tub up against the tree and walked off toward his tent, buttoning his shirt-sleeves, and muttering to himself as he went.

"Now, he'll go and tell mamma, I suppose, and worry her," thought Joyce, as she went into the kitchen. "But I'm too tired to care. If I hadn't been so tired, I probably wouldn't have snapped him off so short, but it just goes to prove that we can't do without a machine. The washing is too hard for me without one. I can't afford to get so worn out every week. It is all right for him to offer to take the place of one. He might keep it up for weeks, and even months, but next fall, if he should get a position in Phœnix, the money would be spent and I'd be left with the bag to hold. I don't think that, under the circumstances, he has any right to call me selfish. I'm *not!*"

The word stuck in her memory, and hurt, as she dragged herself wearily into the sitting-room, and lay down on the couch. After she had pulled the afghan over her shoulders and buried her face in one of the pillows, a few hot tears trickled down through her closed eyelids, and made them smart. The kitchen clock struck eleven.

"Oh, dear!" she said to herself, "I must get up in a few minutes and see about dinner." But the next thing she knew, Norman was ringing the dinner-bell in her ears, shouting that it was one o'clock, and that Jack had dinner ready, and to come before it got cold.

"Oh, Jack, why didn't you call me?" she cried. "I didn't mean to fall asleep. I only stretched out to rest for a few minutes."

He made no answer, busying himself in carrying a hot dish of poached eggs and toast to the table, and bringing his mother's tea. He was carrying on a lively conversation with her.

"Still mad, I suppose," thought Joyce, when he ignored her repeated question. "But evidently he hasn't said anything to mamma about it."

The meal seemed an unusually cheerful one, for although Jack and Joyce had nothing to say to each other, they kept up such a chatter with their mother, that she ate her dinner serenely unconscious of their coolness toward each other. Afterward she insisted upon washing the dishes, so that Joyce could take a well-earned rest, and Jack go down to the ranch to see Mr. Ellestad's new microscope, which had just come. Joyce would not listen to her appeal that she was perfectly able to do that much work, and that she needed the exercise, but finally consented to her helping wipe the dishes, while she cleared the table and washed them. But Jack, after a little urging, started down the road toward the ranch, to spend a long, interesting afternoon there. As he went whistling out of sight Mrs. Ware looked after him fondly.

"I know he's the best boy in the world," she said. "I wish I could afford to give him some of the pleasures that other boys have."

"Seems to me he has about as much as the rest of us," said Joyce, rattling the cups and saucers in the dish-pan. But a picture rose in her mind as she spoke, that made her wish that she had not been so cross and so positive. It was Phil Tremont, on his horse, as he had looked that morning, handsome, fun-loving, and free to do as he pleased, and then in sharp contrast, Jack, standing in the road beside him, in his old outgrown, paint-smeared overalls, his fingers red and wrinkled from the suds, called from his work to see a pleasure in which he could not share. Now that she was rested and refreshed by her dinner, matters looked different. She could even see the force of Jack's argument about the pony being an investment, and she wished again that she had not been so positive in her refusal.

But having once said no, Joyce felt that it would not be dignified to yield. If she changed her mind this time, Jack would think that she was inconsistent; and such is the unyielding policy of fifteen, that she felt that she would rather be called selfish than to admit that she was in the wrong or had been mistaken.

It was a long afternoon. The fact that she and Jack had quarrelled kept recurring to her constantly, and made her uncomfortable and unhappy. He came back from the ranch at supper-time as if nothing had happened, however, and when she asked him some question about the new microscope, he answered with a full description that made her feel he had forgotten their morning disagreement.

" I don't believe that he cares so much about that pony after all," she thought. After supper, when Holland and Mary had disposed of the dishes, she drew out the kitchen-table, and began sprinkling clothes ready for the next day's ironing. The boys had gone to their tent. The door was open between the kitchen and the sitting-room so that the heat might pass in to where Mrs. Ware sat knitting by the lamp. Mary was there also, and her voice came out to Joyce shrilly, as if she were in the room with her.

"It seems a waste of time for me to be learning new pieces to say at school when I know at least a dozen old ones that I recited in Plainsville that would be new out here. But teacher picked this out for me. She's going to keep us in at recess if we don't know our pieces Friday. This has forty-eight lines in it, and I've only four nights to learn it in."

"That is not bad," said Mrs. Ware, consolingly. "Only twelve lines an evening. Read it all to me, then I'll help you with the first quarter."

Joyce stopped her humming as Mary began dramatically:

"'A Boy of Seventy-six.' That's the name of it." She read unusually well for a child of her age, and the verses were new to Joyce:

"You have heard the story, time and again,
Of those brave old heroes, the 'Minute Men,'
Who left their homes to fight or fall,
As soon as they heard their country's call.
Let me tell you of one, unnamed, unknown,
A brave boy-hero, who fought alone.
When the breathless messenger drew rein
He had started whistling, down the lane
With his rod and line, to the brook for trout,
But he paused as he heard the warning shout,
And his father called to him, 'Ben, my son,
I must be off to Lexington!
There is little time for fishing now,
You must take father's place behind the plough.'
One quick good-bye! The boy stood still,
Watching him climb the homeward hill —
In and out of the house again,
With his musket, to join the 'Minute Men.'
Then he turned the furrows, straight and true,
Just as he'd seen his father do.
He dropped the corn in the narrow rows,
And fought for its life with the weeds and crows.
Oh, it was hard, as the days wore on,
To take the place of that father, gone.
The boyish shoulders could hardly bear
All their burden of work and care.
But he thought, 'It is for my country's sake
That father's place at the plough I take.
When the war is over, and peace is won,
How proud he'll be of his little son!'
But they brought him home to a soldier's grave,
Wrapped in the flag he had died to save.
And Ben took up his burden again,
With its added weight of grief and pain,
Saying bravely, 'In all things now

I must take father's place behind the plough.'
Seed-time and harvest came and went,
Steadily still to the work he bent,
For the family needed bread, and then,
So did the half-starved fighting men.
Only a boy! Not a hero bold,
Whose deeds in the histories are told.
Still, there fell under British fire,
No braver son of a patriot sire
Than this young lad, who for duty's sake
Said, 'This is the task I'll undertake.
I cannot fight for my country now,
But I'll take father's place behind the plough.'"

"I wonder why it is," said Mary, thoughtfully, as she came to the end, "that all the heroes live so far away that nobody knows them except the people who write the books and poetry about them. I wish I knew a boy like that."

"You do," said her mother, quietly. "One who has been just as faithful to duty, just as much of a hero in his small way as Ben. Who said the same thing, 'In all things now, I must take father's place behind the plough,' and who has done it, too, so faithfully and well that he has lifted a great burden from his mother's heart, and made living easier for all the family."

"Why, mamma, do I know him? Was it somebody in Plainsville? What was his name?"

"John Alwyn Ware," said her mother, with a smile, although her lips trembled.

"John Alwyn Ware," repeated Mary, with a puzzled expression. "Why, that was papa's name, and you said that he was a boy that I knew."

"Isn't it Jack's name, too?" asked her mother.

"Yes, so it is! But how could *he* take his father's place behind the plough? Papa was a lawyer, and never had any plough."

"Whatever is a man's life-work may be called his plough," explained Mrs. Ware, gently, "and papa's duties were not all in his law-office. They were at home, too, and there is where Jack tried to take his place. He was such a little fellow. My first thought was, 'Oh, how am I ever going to bring up my three boys without their father's help and noble example!' and he came to me, his little face all streaked with tears, and put his arms around me, and said, 'Don't cry, mother, I'll take papa's place now, and help take care of the family. If I can't do anything for awhile but just be a good boy, I'll do that much, and set them a good example.' And from that day to this he has never given me an anxious moment. He is a high-strung boy, fond of having his own way, and it has often been a struggle for him to resist the temptation of doing as his chums did, when they were inclined to be a little wild. But he has always been true to his promise, and Holland and Norman have both been easier to manage, because of the example of obedience he has always set them. So you see the heroes don't always live so far away after all. You've been living in the same house with one, and didn't know it."

Norman came clamouring into the kitchen for something that Holland had sent for, and Joyce lost the rest of the conversation, but what she had heard stayed with her. Little scenes that she had almost forgotten came up in her mind. Now she understood why Jack had so often refused to join in the larks of the other boys. It was not because he was lazy and indifferent, as she had sometimes thought, when he had settled down with a book at home, instead of going with them in the evenings. She understood, too, why he never "answered back" or asked why. Not because he had any less spirit than Holland, or cared less for his own way. It was because of the promise he had made beside his father's coffin. He was setting the highest example he knew of obedience and faithfulness to duty.

"How could I have called him selfish?" she asked herself, "when this is the first time he has asked for anything for his own pleasure since we have been here. He has stayed at home and dug and delved like an old man instead of a boy of fourteen, and of course it must be as dull for him as it is for me. I suppose I didn't realize it, because he never complains as I do. I've had so many more good times than he has," she went on in her self-communing. "My trip to Europe, and the Little Colonel's house-party, — and he was never even out of Plainsville until we came here."

As she thought of the house-party, she caught the gleam of the little ring, the lover's knot of gold on her finger that Eugenia had given her to remind her of the Road of the Loving Heart, and she stood quite still for a moment, looking at it.

"I believe I'll do it," she decided, finally, and fell to work so energetically that the last damp roll of clothes was soon tucked away in the basket. Then taking the candle from the shelf, and shading it carefully with her hand, she hurried out to her tent. Dropping on her knees beside her trunk, she began turning over its contents till she reached a pink bonbon-box at the very bottom.

Inside the box was a letter, and inside the letter was a gold coin, the five dollars that Cousin Kate had sent her Christmas. She had put it sacredly away as a nest-egg, intending to add to it as she could, until there was enough to pay for a course of instruction in illustrating, by correspondence. The address of an art school which advertised to give such lessons, was copied on the envelope.

As she turned the letter irresolutely in her hands, she heard Jack's voice in the next tent, talking to Holland:

"I wonder who'll take my place in the high school nine this year? Wouldn't I give my eyes to pitch for them when they play the Plainsville 'Invincibles'! Wish I could see old Charlie Scudder's red head behind the bat again! And don't I wish I could hear him giving his call for me out by the alley gate! I'd walk from here to Phœnix just to hear it again."

"I don't miss the fellows much as I thought I would," said Holland, who was hunting for a certain hook he wanted in what looked to be a hopeless snarl of fishing-tackle. "There's some first-rate kids go to this school, and I see about as much fun out here as I did at home."

"I suppose it would be different with me if I went to school," said Jack. "But it gets mighty monotonous poking around the desert by yourself, even if you have got a gun. Now that Phil Tremont has his horse, that will cut me out from going with him, for I'll have to foot it wherever I go."

"Oh, I know where there's a dandy Indian pony for sale over by Scottsdale," began Holland. "George Lee told me about it. They're going to put it up at auction Saturday, if they don't sell it before. Don't you wish you had it?"

"You can bet your only dollar I do! I tried to talk Joyce into thinking we could afford it, but she wouldn't be convinced."

"I don't see why she should always have the say-so," said Holland. "She's only a year older than you are, anyhow. She sits down on everything we want to do, as if she was our grandmother. She's too bossy."

"No, she isn't," answered Jack, loyally. "She knows what she is talking about. She's had a mighty tough time trying to make one dollar do the work of two since we've been out here. And she's worked like a squaw, and it's powerful hard on her having so much responsibility. What she says in this wigwam *goes,* even if it doesn't suit our tastes!"

A warm little glow came into Joyce's heart as she knelt there beside the trunk, unconsciously playing eavesdropper. How good it was of Jack to uphold her that way with Holland, who was always resenting her authority, and inclined to be rebellious. Hesitating no longer, she reached into the tray of her trunk for the purse which held the monthly housekeeping allowance. Taking out a crisp five-dollar bill, she folded the coin in it, and ran out toward the boys' tent.

The candle-light, streaming through the canvas, made a transparency on which the green-eyed gods of the Dacotahs stood out in startling distinctness. Holland's shadow, bending over the fishing-tackle beside the candle, reached to the top of the tent. Jack's waved its heels over the foot-board of the bed on which he had thrown himself.

"Jack," she said, putting her head through the opening of the tent where the flap was pinned back, "I've changed my mind about that investment. I've decided to go in with you. I'll put in Cousin Kate's Christmas money, and if you still want to take the place of the washing-machine and wringer, we'll use the five dollars they would cost, to buy the pony. Then I think the most appropriate name we could give it would be *Washing*-ton!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE

In order to understand the excitement that prevailed at the Wigwam when it was announced that the Little Colonel was on her way toward it, one would first have to understand what an important part she had played in the Ware household. To begin with, the place where she lived had always seemed a sort of enchanted land to the children. "The Old Kentucky Home" was their earliest cradle-song, and their favourite nursery-tales were about the people and places of Lloydsboro Valley, where their mother's happy girlhood had been passed.

They might grow tired of Red Riding Hood and Cinderella. Aladdin and even Ali Baba and the forty thieves might lose their charm, but no story failed to interest them that began "Once upon a time in Lloydsboro Valley." These reminiscences had passed from Joyce to Jack, and on down the line, with the high chair and the Cock Robin book and the red building-blocks, belonging to each in turn, but claimed by all. Mary's tears, Holland's tempers, and Norman's tantrums had many a time disappeared as if by magic, at those familiar words.

After Joyce's return from the house-party at Locust, the Little Colonel became the central figure of interest, and all the glamour with which their childish imaginations had surrounded the place, now gathered around her like a nimbus around a saint. To Mary, who had read the "Princess Winsome" until she knew it all by heart, Lloyd was something between an ideal princess, who played on a golden harp, and an ideal little schoolgirl, who lived in a real palace, and did exactly as she pleased. She could talk of nothing else, after the letter came, and followed Joyce and her mother with innumerable questions, pausing often before the pictures of Lloyd and Tarbaby.

The boys' interest in her coming was increased when they found that she was going to bring a rifle, and that her father had promised to hire a horse for her as soon as they arrived.

Phil, who came so often to the Wigwam now that he seemed almost one of the family, caught so much of its enthusiasm over the coming guest, that he planned picnics and excursions for every day of her visit. He even had a voice in what he called the Council of War, in which it was decided to let the two older boys move their cots out-of-doors. Holland had been clamouring to sleep outside the tent ever since George Lee told him that he had begun to do so, and that was what made the cowboys so strong.

So the gaily decorated tent, with its "figures mystical and awful," was made ready for Lloyd, and Norman took Joyce's place in his mother's tent.

"She'll know that she's really out West when she once sets her eyes on those gods of the Dacotahs," Holland said to Mary on their way to school one morning. "As long as we call this the Wigwam, I think we ought to be dressed up in war-paint and feathers when she gets here. I'll do it, Mary, if you will. I'll dare you to. I'll double dare you!"

Usually a double dare never failed to have the desired effect upon Mary. She would attempt anything he suggested. But it was too serious a matter to risk the first impression that such an appearance would make upon Lloyd, so she trudged on with a resolute shake of her little blond braids and big blue bows.

"No, sir-ree, Holland Ware. I'm going to stay home from school that day, and wear my very best white dress and my rosebud sash. It's just as good as new if it is two years old, and the little spots on it where I squirted orange-juice don't show at all when it's tied. And Joyce said that she is going to put your hands to soak overnight, to see if she can't get them clean for once, for if there's anything the Little Colonel abominates, it's dirty hands and finger-nails. And you've got to wear a necktie every day, and go into Phœnix and have your hair cut. So there!"

"Oh, I have, have I?" repeated Holland, mimicking her tone. "If Joyce has all those plans in her head, she can just get them out again. I'm not going to be a dude for any old girl in the country, I don't care if it is Lloyd Sherman. And if she is so dreadful particular as all that, I'll do something to shock her every day, till she gets used to it. Yes, I believe I'll come to the table the very first meal in a blanket, with feathers in my hair, and if you dare tell anybody beforehand, I'll — I'll — well, I'll get even with you in a way you won't like."

"Oh, Holland, please don't! *Please* don't disgrace us," begged Mary, who always took his threats in earnest. "It would be too dreadful. I'll give you something nice if you'll promise not to."

"What will you give me?"

"What have I got that you want?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'll have to think about it."

Holland had no intention of carrying out his threats, but he kept Mary in a fever of anxiety all week, saying one hour that he'd think about her offer, and the next that she didn't have anything he cared for, and that he preferred the fun of tormenting the girls to anything she could give.

Joyce drew a star on the kitchen calendar, over the date on which they expected Lloyd to arrive; a big five-pointed red star. She rejoiced that it fell on a Wednesday, for by that time the washing and ironing would be out of the way. Her first experience in laundry-work made her look ahead to the coming Mondays as weekly bugbears. But the second was not so hard as the first. True to his promise, Jack did all the rubbing and wringing, getting up at daybreak to start the fire under the big wash-boiler out in the yard.

This morning, as he touched a match to the little pile of kindling, and fanned the blaze with his hat, the new pony, grazing in the alfalfa field, came up to the pasture-bars with a whinny, and put his head over the fence, as if to watch him.

"Oh, you think you'll boss this job, do you, Mr. Washington?" said Jack, who, in the short time he had had the pony, had grown as fond of him as if he were a person, and who talked to him as if he had human intelligence. "Well, you ought to take an interest in the washing, since that's the way you got your name, and the reason you are here. Wait till I get this boiler filled, and I'll bring you a lump of sugar."

Washington was a wiry little pony. He had a wicked light in his eyes, and was too free with his heels at times, but he had been raised as a household pet, and stood like a kitten while Jack rubbed his nose and fed him sugar.

"Take it easy while you can," said Jack. "If I have to work like a dog all morning on your account, to earn half the dollars that you cost us, I'll put you through your paces this afternoon to make up for it. You'll think that you are the Wild Mazeppa by the time we get back. Oh, you're such a nice old fellow!"

Nobody was near to see the impulsive way in which the boy threw his arms around the pony's neck and hugged him tight. The feeling of possession made him happy as a king, as he sat on the topmost bar braiding Washington's shaggy forelock, while the sun came up over the Camelback, and the morning chorus of bird-calls swelled louder and sweeter over the awakening world.

The fire under the boiler was crackling merrily, and the water was steaming, when Joyce came out of her tent and started toward the kitchen. She stopped a moment by the pasture-bars to reach through and give the pony a friendly stroke, for she was almost as proud and fond of him as Jack. She had had several delightful rides on him; once with Jack for company, on Phil's new horse, and twice with Phil, when they had raced for miles down the sandy road, past olive orchards and orange groves, sweet with the coming of spring.

"I'm going to clip his mane to-morrow," said Jack, as he slipped down from his seat, and followed Joyce toward the kitchen. "He must look his best when Lloyd comes."

"We've done everything to that tune for a week," laughed Joyce. "'When Lloyd comes' has grown to be a sort of refrain, running through all our conversation. You notice now, at breakfast, and see how often it will be used."

Holland was the first to repeat the well-worn phrase, as he took his seat at the table, and waited hungrily for his plate to be served.

" When Lloyd comes you'll have some of those good little corn muffins for breakfast, won't you, Joyce? Kentucky people aren't used to cold bread."

Joyce smiled at Jack as the words they were waiting for were repeated, and then almost mechanically used them herself in her answer. " We'll have them once in awhile, I suppose, but we can't afford a very great change in our bill of fare. We'll have a mighty skimpy dinner to-day, for there's not much left over from Sunday, and we'll be too busy washing to stop to cook. But I want to have a big baking before Lloyd comes. If I go in to meet her Wednesday, in the ranch surrey, I'll have to do the extra cooking to-morrow afternoon, I suppose, after the ironing is out of the way."

Mary cast an inquiring glance at the red star on the calendar.

" Only to-day and to-morrow, then I can stay home the day after that when Lloyd comes, and wear my best white dress and my rosebud sash."

" Oh, that will be joyful," chanted Holland, imitating her tone.

" I wish that I were able to help you more with the work," said Mrs. Ware, wistfully. " Then you would have more time for preparation. Norman and I can manage the tent work, I think, this morning. Then I'll go down to the seat under the willows, and finish that Indian head sofa pillow. We must have that done before Lloyd comes."

"Seems to me that I can hardly wait," said Mary, giving an impatient little wiggle that nearly upset her glass of milk.

"I wish Betty were coming, too," said Joyce. "She would be making up stories from morning till night about the strange things out here; but she wouldn't have much peace. You children would never let her out of your sight."

"Like Davy did at the cuckoo's nest," said Mary, who knew Betty's history almost as well as her own, and loved dearly to talk about it. Betty's devotion to her godmother since she had gone to live at Locust, and her wonderful gift for writing verses and stories made her almost as interesting to Mary as the Little Colonel herself. As she moved about the house after breakfast, doing the little duties that fell to her lot before school-time, she chanted in a happy undertone all the play of the "Rescue of the Princess Winsome," from beginning to end.

Sir Feal, the faithful knight, had been associated in her mind with Phil, since the day he rescued her from her fright when she was running away from the Indian. She was the princess, and Phil the gallant knight, who, she dreamed in her romantic little heart, might some day send her messages by the morning-glories and forget-me-nots, as Sir Feal had done. Of course, not now, but some day when she was grown, and wore long, lovely dresses, and had a beautiful voice. She had pictured herself many a time, standing by a casement window with a dove clasped to her breast, and singing the song, "Flutter, and fly, flutter, and fly, bear him my heart of gold."

But now that the real princess was coming, she lost interest in her own little day-dreams, which were of such a far-away time and so vague and shadowy, and began dreaming them for Lloyd. She wondered what Phil would think of her when they first met. She had already recited the entire play to him, and showed him the miniature, and, as he studied the sweet face at the casement, bending over the dove, he had hummed after Mary in an absent-minded sort of way:

"Spin, spin, oh, golden thread,
He dreams of me night and day.
The poppy's chalice is sweet and red,
Oh, Love will find a way."

She was still humming it this morning when she came out of the back door, ready to start to school, and her thoughts were full of the play.

"Joyce," she remarked, critically, pausing to watch her sister put more wood on the camp-fire and poke the clothes in the boiler with the end of an old broom-handle, "you look like the witch in the play:

> "'On the fire
> I'll pile my faggots higher and higher,
> And in the bubbling water stir
> This hank of hair, this patch of fur.
> Bubble and boil, and snake-skin coil!
> This charm shall all plans but the Ogre's foil.'"

Joyce laughed, and Mary, slipping through the bars, followed Holland across lots to school. "I do feel like a witch in this old dress and sunbonnet," she said, "and I must look like one. But no one ever comes here in the mornings but Phil, and he has had his orders to stay away on Mondays."

"What is the use of worrying about how you look?" asked Jack. "Nobody expects a fellow to play Chinese laundryman with a high collar and kid gloves on."

Sousing the tubful of clothes into the rinse-water, Joyce went on vigorously with her morning's work. She and Jack relapsed into busy silence as the morning wore on, and when the clock struck eleven, neither had spoken for nearly an hour.

Suddenly a sound of wheels, coming rapidly along the road, and a child's high-pitched voice made them both stop and look up to listen. "Aren't we getting back-woodsy!" Joyce exclaimed, as Jack shook the suds from his arms, and ran to the corner of the kitchen to watch a buggy drive past. "So few people come out this desert road, that it is really an event to see any one. I suppose we ought not to be blamed for staring."

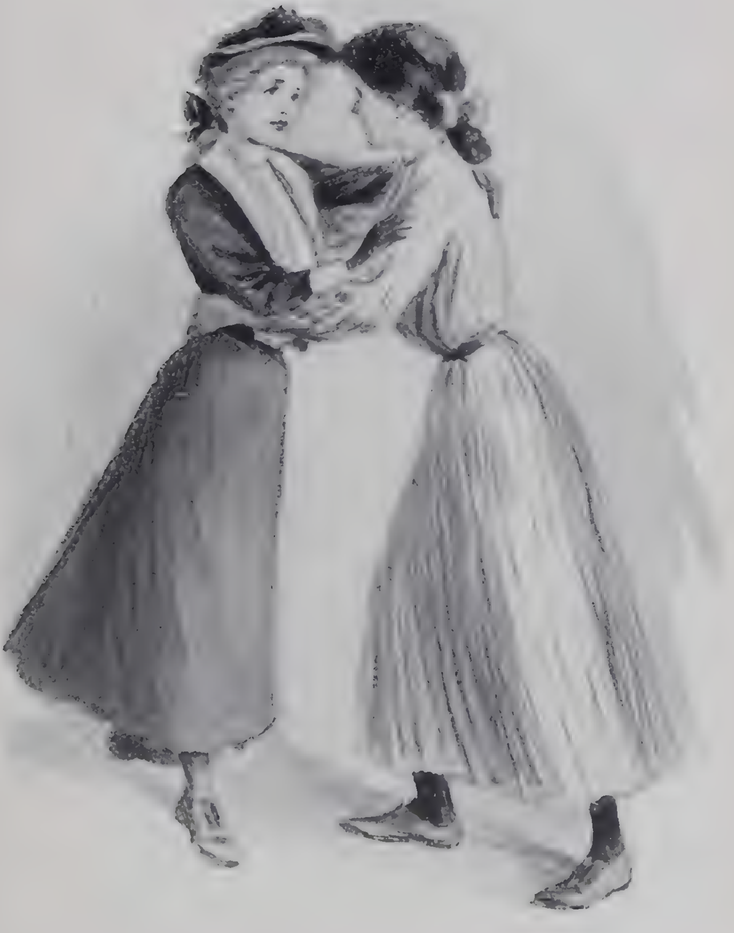
"It is Hazel Lee," said Jack. "I'm sure that's her voice. There must be some new boarders at the ranch, for there's a strange gentleman and a girl in the buggy with her, and she's standing up in front pointing out the country to them."

Joyce came and looked over his shoulder. "Yes, that's Hazel," she said. "She's the knowingest little thing I ever saw for a child of five. You couldn't lose her anywhere around this region, and she is as good as a guide-book, for giving information. Mr. Ellestad was laughing the other day about her disputing with the White Bachelor over the market price of chickens. She was in the right, too, and proved it. She hears everything, and never forgets anything she hears."

"She's saying something now to amuse those people mightily," said Jack, as a hearty laugh rang out above the rattle of wheels. Joyce transferred her gaze from the chubby, bare-headed child, leaning over the dashboard with eager gestures, to the two strangers behind her. Then she grasped Jack's elbow with a little cry of astonishment. "It's Lloyd!" she gasped. "Lloyd Sherman and her father, two days ahead of time. What shall we do? Everything is in a mess, and nothing in the house for dinner!"

That instant Hazel's bright eyes spied them, her plump little finger pointed them out, and Joyce had no more time to consider appearances; for, springing over the wheel, Lloyd came running toward her, calling in the soft Southern accent that was the sweetest music to Joyce's ears, "Oh, you deah, darling old thing! What made you move away out to the edge of nowhere? I thought we'd nevah, nevah get heah!"

In the delight of seeing her again, Joyce forgot all about things being topsyturvy, and how little there was in the house for dinner. She even forgot to introduce Jack, who stood awkwardly waiting in the background, till Mr. Sherman, amused



"'I THOUGHT WE'D NEVAH, NEVAH GET HEAH!'"

at the girls' absorption in each other, stepped out of the buggy and came forward, laughing.

"It looks as if the two Jacks will have to introduce themselves," he said, holding out his hand. Jack's awkwardness vanished instantly at this hearty greeting, and a moment later he was shaking hands with Lloyd as easily as Joyce was welcoming Lloyd's father, wholly indifferent to his outgrown overalls and rolled-up shirt-sleeves.

In the meantime, Hazel, who was a major-general in her small way for comprehending situations, had, of her own accord, raced off to find Mrs. Ware and bring her to welcome the unexpected guests.

"And you are Aunt Emily!" exclaimed Lloyd, turning with outstretched hands as the sweet-faced little woman came toward them. "Mothah said you wouldn't mind if I called you that, because you and she have always been such deah friends."

There were tears in Mrs. Ware's eyes as she returned the impulsive kiss. She had expected to be fond of Elizabeth's only daughter. She had hoped to find her pretty and sweet, but she had not looked for this winsomeness, which had been the Little Colonel's greatest charm since babyhood. With that greeting, Lloyd walked straight into her heart.

The surprise ended more satisfactorily than most surprises do, for, while Jack was unhitching the horse, and Mrs. Ware was talking over old times with Mr. Sherman, whom she had known in her school-days, some one went whizzing around the house on a bicycle.

"It's Jo, the Japanese chef from the ranch," said Joyce, springing up from the front door-step where she sat with Lloyd, and starting back to the kitchen to ask his errand.

"Oh, let me go, too," cried Lloyd, following. "I nevah saw a Jap close enough to speak to."

Lloyd could not understand the pigeon-English with which he delivered a basket he had brought, but it was evidently a funny proceeding to Jo. He handed it over as if it had been a joke, doubling up like a jack-knife as he pointed to the contents, and laughing so contagiously that Joyce and Lloyd could not help laughing, too.

"He not velly nice pie, maybe," giggled Jo. "But you eat him allee same. Mis' Lee say you not lookee for comp'nee. You not have nuzzing cook."

"Did Mrs. Lee tell you to bring the basket, Jo?" asked Joyce.

He shook his head. "Mis' Lee say take soup," pointing to the large glass jar of clearest consommé, smoking hot, which Joyce had just lifted from the basket. "I, *me,* bling along the pie, for my compli*ment.* She no care. She kind, Clistian lady."

"She certainly is," laughed Joyce. "Now we can at least begin and end our dinner in style. That's a *lovely* pie, Jo; the prettiest I ever saw."

The little almond eyes twinkled, as he watched her hold up the dainty pastry with its snowy meringue for Lloyd to admire.

"Aw, he not velly good pie," protested Jo, with a self-conscious smirk, knowing in his soul that it was the perfection of pastry, and eager to hear Joyce say so again. "I make-a heap much betta nex-a time."

Then, with another laugh, he whizzed away on his wheel, pausing under the pepper-trees to catch up Hazel, and take her home on his handle-bars.

"Joyce," asked Lloyd, as she watched him disappear down the road, "did you uncawk a bottle, or rub Aladdin's lamp? I feel as if I had walked into the Arabian nights, to have a foreign-looking, almond-eyed chef suddenly appear out of the desert with consommé and pie, like a genie out of a bottle."

"It doesn't happen every day," laughed Joyce.

"I suppose that after you stopped at the ranch to inquire the way here, and picked up Hazel for a guide, that it occurred to Mrs. Lee that we were not looking for you until Wednesday, and that, as this is our wash-day, maybe we wouldn't have a very elaborate dinner prepared, and she thought she would help us out in a neighbourly way. Jo enjoyed coming. When we were at the ranch, he was always making delicious little extra dishes for mamma."

"Oh, I hope our coming soonah than you expected hasn't made a difference!" exclaimed Lloyd. "I nevah thought about yoah doing yoah own work. Mr. Robeson decided not to stop in New Mexico as long as he had planned, and, when I found that would put us heah two days soonah, I wouldn't let Papa Jack telegraph. I'm so sorry."

"Don't say another word about it," interrupted Joyce. "The only difference it makes is to you and your father. You've not been received in quite such good style as if we'd been dressed in our best bibs and tuckers, but maybe you'll feel more at home, dropping right down in the middle of things this way."

Lloyd felt as if she certainly had dropped down in the middle of things, into a most intimate knowledge of the Ware family's affairs. For, as Joyce circled around, setting the table, she saw that a pitcher of milk, bread and butter, and some cold boiled potatoes, sliced ready to fry, was all that the pantry held for dinner. If Joyce had spoken one word of apology, Lloyd would have felt exceedingly uncomfortable, but she only laughed as she put the consommé on the stove to keep hot, and set out the pie-plates on the sideboard.

"Lucky for you," she said, "that the genie came out of his bottle. We were spending all our energy in rushing through the laundry work, so that we could make grand preparations for to-morrow, but we couldn't have equalled Jo, no matter how hard we tried."

While Joyce, talking as fast as she worked, fried the potatoes and sliced the bread, Jack wrung out the last basketful of clothes and hung them on the line, and then disappeared in his mother's tent to make himself presentable for dinner. Lloyd had already had a peep into the tent that she was to share with Joyce, and had called her father to come and have a laugh with her over the green-eyed gods of the Dacotahs which were to guard her slumbers during her visit to the Wigwam. He was to leave that same night, and go on to the mines with Mr. Robeson and his party.

Her trunk was brought out from town soon after dinner, and, while she partly unpacked it, putting the things she would need oftenest into the bureau drawers that Joyce had emptied for her, Jack and Mr. Sherman drove away to look at the horses one of the neighbours kept to hire to tourists. They came back later with a shaggy Indian pony, which Lloyd at once mounted for a trial ride.

Joyce went with her on Washington as far as the White Bachelor's. Lloyd was not accustomed to a cross saddle, or to guiding a horse by the pressure of the bridle-reins against its neck, so they rode slowly at first. When they were almost opposite the camp at Lee's ranch, Joyce saw a familiar little figure trudging along the road, and wished with sisterly solicitude that they could avert a meeting. It was Mary on her way home from school, dusty and dishevelled, as usual at such times, one hair-ribbon lost, and the braid it had bound hanging loose and limp over her ear. Joyce was not near enough to see, but she felt sure that her shoe-laces were dangling, that there was ink on her hands and maybe her face, and that at least one button, if not more, had burst loose from the back of her dress. She knew that the child would be overwhelmed with mortification if she should come face to face with the Princess Winsome in such a condition, when she had set her heart upon appearing before her in her white dress and rosebud sash.

Before Joyce could think of an excuse to turn back, Mary had settled the matter for herself. Hazel had stopped her at the gate to tell her of the unexpected arrival, so she was not wholly unprepared for this sudden meeting. Darting up the high bank of the irrigating ditch like a little gray lizard, she slid down on the other side into its dry bed and crouched there till they passed. There had been no water running for several days, but it would have made no difference to Mary. She would have plunged in just the same, even if it had been neck deep. She simply could not let the adored Little Colonel see her in such a plight.

Joyce almost laughed aloud at the frantic haste in which she scuttled out of sight, but seeing that Lloyd had been too absorbed in guiding her pony to notice it, she said nothing, and delayed their return until she was sure that Mary was safe in her tent. So it was that when Lloyd went back to the Wigwam one member of the Ware family was arrayed in all her glory according to the original programme. Mary stood out under the pepper-trees, washed, combed, and clad, painfully conscious of her festive garments, which had had so few occasions to be donned on the desert, and in a quiver of eagerness. It was not only Lloyd Sherman who was coming toward her up the road. It was the Little Colonel, the Queen of Hearts, the Princess Winsome, the heroine of a hundred familiar tales, and the beautiful Dream-Maiden around whom she had woven all she knew or imagined of romance.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE DESERT OF WAITING

LLOYD sat with her elbows on the white kitchen table, watching Joyce at her Saturday afternoon baking. Five busy days had passed since her coming, and she felt almost as much at home in the Wigwam as any of the Wares. Phil had been there every day. Mrs. Lee had invited her to the ranch to tea, where she had met all the interesting boarders she had heard so much about. Jack, Holland, and Norman devoted themselves to her entertainment, and Mary followed her so adoringly, and copied so admiringly every gesture and intonation, that Holland called her "Miss Copy-cat" whenever he spoke to her out of his mother's hearing.

Lloyd could not fail to see how they all looked up to her, and it was exceedingly pleasant to be petted and deferred to by everybody, and on all occasions. The novelty of the place had not yet worn off, and she enjoyed watching Joyce at her housekeeping duties, and helped whenever she would allow it.

"How white and squashy that dough looks," she said, as Joyce turned it deftly out on the moulding-board and began kneeding it. "I'd like to put my fingahs in it the way you do, and pat it into shape, and pinch in the cawnahs. I wish you'd let me try to make a loaf next week. Will you, Joyce?"

"You may now, if you want to," said Joyce. Lloyd started to her tent to wash her hands, but Jack's shout out in the road stopped her as she reached the door. He was galloping toward the house as fast as Washington could carry him, and she waited to hear what he had to say.

"Get your rifle, quick, Lloyd!" he called, waving his hat excitedly. "Chris says that the river is full of ducks. We can get over there and have a shot at them before supper-time if we hurry. I'll catch your pony and saddle him while you get ready."

"How perfectly splendid!" cried Lloyd, her eyes shining with pleasure. "I'll be ready in almost no time." Then, as he galloped on toward the pasture, she turned to Joyce. "Oh, I wish *you* could go, too!"

"So do I," was the answer; "but it's out of the question. We've only the one horse, you know, and I haven't any gun, and I can't leave the baking, so there's three good reasons. But I'm glad you have the chance, Lloyd. Run along and get ready. Don't you bother about me."

By the time Jack came back leading Lloyd's pony, she was ready and waiting at the kitchen door, in her white sweater and brown corduroy riding-skirt. Her soft, light hair was gathered up under a little hunting-cap, and she carried her rifle in its holster, ready to be fastened to her saddle.

"Oh, I wish you were going, too, Joyce!" she exclaimed again, as she stood up in the stirrups and smoothed the folds of the divided skirt. Settling herself firmly in the saddle and gathering up the reins with one hand, she blew her an airy kiss with the other, and started off at the brisk pace Jack set for her on Washington.

Joyce called a laughing good-bye after them, but, as she stood shading her eyes with her hand to watch them ride away, all the brightness seemed to die out of the mid-afternoon sunshine.

"How much I should have enjoyed it!" she thought. "I could ride as well as Jack if I had his pony, and shoot as well as Lloyd if I had her rifle, and would enjoy the trip to the river as much as either of them if I could only leave the work.

But I'm like that old Camelback Mountain over there. I'll never get away. It will be this way all the rest of my life."

Through the blur of tears that dimmed her sight a moment, the old mountain looked more hopeless than ever. She turned and went into the house to escape the sight of it. Presently, when the loaves were in the oven, and she had nothing to do but watch the baking, she brought her portfolio out to the kitchen and began looking through it for a sketch she had promised to show to Lloyd. It was the first time she had opened the portfolio since she had left Plainsville, and the sight of its contents made her fingers tingle. While she glanced over the sketches she had taken such pleasure in making, both in water-colours and pen and ink, her mother came into the kitchen.

"Joyce," she said, briskly, "don't you suppose we could afford some cookies while the oven is hot? I haven't baked anything for so long that I believe it would do me good to stir around in the kitchen awhile. I'll make some gingersnaps, and cut them out in fancy shapes, with a boy and girl apiece for the children, as I always used to make. Are there any raisins for the eyes and mouths?"

It seemed so much like old times that Joyce sprang up to give her mother a squeeze. "That will be lovely!" she cried, heartily. "Here's an apron, and I'll beat the eggs and help you."

"No, I want to do it all myself," Mrs. Ware protested. "And I want you to take your sketching outfit, and go down to the clump of willows where Jack put the rustic bench for me. There are lovely reflections in the irrigating canal now, and the shadows are so soft that you ought to get a very pretty picture. You haven't drawn any since we left home, and I'm afraid your hand will forget its cunning if you never practise."

"What's the use," was on the tip of Joyce's tongue, but she could not dim the smile on her mother's face by her own hopeless mood, and presently she took her box of water-colours and started off to the seat under the willows. Mary and Norman, like two muddy little beavers, were using their Saturday afternoon playtime in building a dam across the lateral that watered the side yard. Joyce stood watching them a moment.

"What's the use of your doing that?" she asked, impatiently. "It can't stay there. You'll have to tear it down when you stop playing, and then there'll be all your work for nothing."

"We don't care, do we, Norman?" answered

Mary, cheerfully. "It's fun while we're doing it, isn't it, Norman?"

As Joyce walked on, Mary's lively chatter followed her, and she could hear her mother singing as she moved about the kitchen. She was glad that they were all happy, but somehow it irritated her to feel that she was the only discontented one. It made her lonely. She opened her box and spread out her material, but she was in no mood for painting. She couldn't get the right shade of green in the willows, and the reflections in the water were blotchy.

"It's no use to try," she said, finally. "Mamma was right. My hand has already lost its cunning."

Leaning back on the rustic seat, she began idly tracing profiles on the paper, scarcely conscious of what she was doing. People's faces at first, then the outline of Camelback Mountain. Abstractedly, time after time, she traced it with slow sweeps of her brush until more than a score of kneeling camels looked back at her from the sheet of paper.

Presently a cough just behind her aroused her from her fit of abstraction, and, turning hastily, she saw Mr. Ellestad, the old Norwegian, coming toward her along the little path from the house. He had been almost a daily visitor at the Wigwam since they moved into it, not always coming in, usually stopping for only a moment's chat under the pepper-trees, as he strolled by. But several times he had spent an entire morning with them, reading aloud, while Joyce ironed and her mother sewed, and Norman built block houses on the floor beside them. Once he had taken tea with them. He rarely came without bringing a book or a new magazine, or something of interest. And even when he was empty-handed, his unfailing cheerfulness made his visits a benefaction. Mary and Norman called him " Uncle Jan," such a feeling of kinship had grown up between them.

" Mary said you were here," he began, in his quaint, hesitating fashion, " so I came to find you. I have finished my legend at last, — the legend I have made about Camelback Mountain. You know I have always insisted that there should be one, and as tradition has failed to hand one down to us, the task of manufacturing one has haunted me for three winters. Always, it seems, the old mountain has something to say to me whenever I look at it, something I failed to understand. But at last I have interpreted its message to mankind."

With a hearty greeting, Joyce moved over to make room for him upon the bench, and, as he sat down, he saw the sheet of paper on her lap covered with the repeated outlines of the old mountain.

"Ah! It has been speaking to you also!" he exclaimed. "What did it say?"

"Just one word," answered Joyce, — "'*Hopeless!*' Everything out here is hopeless. It's useless to try to do anything or be anything. If fate has brought you here, kneel down and give up. No use to struggle, no use to hope. You'll never get away."

He started forward eagerly. "At first, yes, that is what I thought it said to me. But now I know it was only the echo of my own bitter mood I heard. But it is a mistake; that is not its message. Listen! I want to read it to you."

He took a note-book from his pocket. "Of course, it is crude yet. This is only the first draft. I shall polish it and study every word, and fit the sentences into place until the thought is crystallized as a real legend should be, to be handed down to future generations. Then people will not suspect that it is a home-made thing, spun from the fancy of one Jan Ellestad, a simple old Norwegian, who had no other legacy to leave the world he loved. This is it:

"'Once upon a time, a caravan set out across the desert, laden with merchandise for a far-distant market. Some of the camels bore in their packs wine-skins that held the richest vintage of the Orient. Some bore tapestries, and some carried dyestuffs and the silken fruits of the loom. On Shapur's camel was a heavy load of salt.

"'The hope of each merchant was to reach the City of his Desire before the Golden Gate should close. There were other gates by which they might enter, but this one, opening once a year to admit the visiting rajahs from the sister cities, afforded a rare opportunity to those fortunate enough to arrive at the same time. It was the privilege of any who might fall in with the royal retinue to follow in its train to the ruling rajah's palace, and gain access to its courtyard. And wares displayed there for sale often brought fabulous sums, a hundredfold greater sometimes than when offered in the open market.

"'Only to a privileged few would the Golden Gate ever swing open at any other time. It would turn on its hinges for any one sent at a king's behest, or any one bearing something so rare and precious that only princes could purchase. No common vender could hope to pass its shining portal save in the rear of the train that yearly followed the rajahs.

" 'So they urged their beasts with all diligence. Foremost in the caravan, and most zealous of all, was Shapur. In his heart burned the desire to be first to enter the Golden Gate, and the first one at the palace with his wares. But, half-way across the desert, as they paused at an oasis to rest, a dire lameness fell upon his camel, and it sank upon the sand. In vain he urged it to continue its journey. The poor beast could not rise under its great load.

" 'Sack by sack he lessened its burden, throwing it off grudgingly and with sighs, for he was minded to lose as little as possible of his prospective fortune. But even rid of its entire load, the camel could not rise, and Shapur was forced to let his companions go on without him.

" 'For long days and nights he watched beside his camel, bringing it water from the fountain and feeding it with the herbage of the oasis, and at last was rewarded by seeing it struggle to its feet and take a few limping steps. In his distress of mind at being left behind by the caravan, he had not noticed where he had thrown the load. A tiny rill, trickling down from the fountain, had run through the sacks and dissolved the salt, and when he went to gather up his load, only a paltry portion was left, a single sackful.

"'"Now, Allah has indeed forgotten me!" he cried, and cursing the day that he was born, he rent his mantle, and beat upon his breast. Even if his camel were able to set out across the desert, it would be useless to seek a market now that he had no merchandise. So he sat on the ground, his head bowed in his hands. Water there was for him to drink, and the fruit of the date-palm, and the cooling shade of many trees, but he counted them as naught. A fever of unrest consumed him. A baffled ambition bowed his head in the dust.

"'When he looked at his poor camel kneeling in the sand, he cried out: "Ah, woe is me! Of all created things, I am most miserable! Of all dooms mine is the most unjust! Why should I, with life beating strong in my veins, and ambition like a burning simoom in my breast, be left here helpless on the sands, where I can achieve nothing, and can make no progress toward the City of my Desire?"

"'One day, as he sat thus under the palms, a bee buzzed about him. He brushed it away, but it returned so persistently that he looked up with languid interest. "Where there are bees, there must be honey," he said. "If there be any sweetness in this desert, better that I should go in its quest than sit here bewailing my fate."

"'Leaving the camel browsing by the fountain, he followed the bee. For many miles he pursued it, till far in the distance he beheld the palm-trees of another oasis. He quickened his steps, for an odour rare as the perfumes of Paradise floated out to meet him. The bee had led him to the Rose Garden of Omar.

"'Now Omar was an alchemist, a sage with the miraculous power of transmuting the most common things of earth into something precious. The fame of his skill had travelled to far countries. So many pilgrims sought him to beg his wizard touch that the question, "Where is the house of Omar?" was heard daily at the gates of the city. But for a generation that question had remained unanswered. No man knew the place of the house of Omar, since he had taken upon himself the life of a hermit. Somewhere, they knew, in the solitude of the desert, he was practising the mysteries of his art, and probing deeper into its secrets, but no one could point to the path leading thither. Only the bees knew, and, following the bee, Shapur found himself in the old alchemist's presence.

" 'Now Shapur was a youth of gracious mien, and pleasing withal. With straightforward speech, he told his story, and Omar, who could read the minds of men as readily as unrolled parchments, was touched by his tale. He bade him come in and be his guest until sundown.

" 'So Shapur sat at his board and shared his bread, and rose refreshed by his wine and his wise words. And at parting, the old man said, with a keen glance into his eyes: "Thou thinkest that because I am Omar, with the power to transmute all common things to precious ones, how easily I could take the remnant of salt that is still left to thee in thy sack and change it into gold. Then couldst thou go joyfully on to the City of thy Desire, as soon as thy camel is able to carry thee, far richer for thy delay."

" 'Shapur's heart gave a bound of hope, for that is truly what he had been thinking. But at the next words it sank.

" ' "Nay, Shapur, each man must be his own alchemist. Believe me, for thee the desert holds a greater opportunity than kings' houses could offer. Give me but thy patient service in this time of waiting, and I will share such secrets with thee that, when thou dost finally win to the Golden Gate, it shall be with wares that shall gain for thee a royal entrance."

" 'Then Shapur went back to his camel, and, in the cool of the evening, urged it to its feet, and led it slowly across the sands. And because it could bear no burden, he lifted the remaining sack of salt to his own back, and carried it on his shoulders all the way. When the moon shone white and full in the zenith over the Rose Garden of Omar, he knocked at the gate, calling: "Here am I, Omar, at thy bidding, and here is the remnant of my salt. All that I have left I bring to thee, and stand ready now to yield my patient service."

" 'Then Omar bade him lead his camel to the fountain, and leave him to browse on the herbage around it. Pointing to a row of great stone jars, he said: "There is thy work. Every morning before sunrise, they must be filled with rose-petals, plucked from the myriad roses of the garden, and the petals covered with water from the fountain."

" ' "A task for poets," thought Shapur, as he began. "What more delightful than to stand in the moonlighted garden and pluck the velvet leaves." But after awhile the thorns tore his hands, and the rustle and hiss underfoot betrayed the presence of serpents, and sleep weighed heavily upon his eyelids. It grew monotonous, standing hour after hour, stripping the rose-leaves from the calyxes until thousands and thousands and thousands had been dropped into the great jars. The very sweetness of the task began to cloy upon him.

" 'When the stars had faded and the east begun to brighten, old Omar came out. " 'Tis well," he said. " Now break thy fast, and then to slumber with thee, to prepare for another sleepless night."

" 'So long months went by, till it seemed to Shapur that the garden must surely become exhausted. But for every rose he plucked, two bloomed in its stead, and night after night he filled the jars.

" 'Still he was learning no secrets, and he asked himself questions sometimes. Was he not wasting his life? Would it not have been better to have waited by the other fountain until some caravan passed by that would carry him out of the solitude to the dwellings of men? What opportunity was the desert offering him greater than kings' houses could give?

" 'And ever the thorns tore him more sorely, and the lonely silence of the nights weighed upon him. Many a time he would have left his task had not the shadowy form of his camel, kneeling outside by the fountain, seemed to whisper to him through the starlight: "Patience, Shapur, patience!"

"'Once, far in the distance, he saw the black outline of a distant caravan passing along the horizon where day was beginning to break. He did no more work until it had passed from sight. Gazing after it with a fierce longing to follow, he pictured the scenes it was moving toward, — the gilded minarets of the mosques, the deep-toned ringing of bells, the cries of the populace, and all the life and stir of the market-place. When the shadowy procession had passed, the great silence of the desert smote him like a pain.

"'Again looking out, he saw his faithful camel, and again it seemed to whisper: "Patience, Shapur, patience! So thou, too, shalt fare forth to the City of thy Desire."

"'One day in the waning of summer, Omar called him into a room in which he had never been before. "Now at last," said he, "hast thou proven thyself worthy to be the sharer of my secrets. Come! I will show thee! Thus are the roses distilled, and thus is gathered up the precious oil floating on the tops of the vessels.

"'"Seest thou this tiny vial? It weighs but the weight of one rupee, but it took the sweetness of two hundred thousand roses to make the attar it contains, and so costly is it that only princes may purchase. It is worth more than thy entire load of salt that was washed away at the fountain."

"'Shapur worked diligently at the new task till there came a day when Omar said to him: "Well done, Shapur! Behold the gift of the desert, its reward for thy patient service in its solitude!"

"'He placed in Shapur's hands a crystal vase, sealed with a seal and filled with the precious attar.

"'"Wherever thou goest this sweetness will open for thee a way and win for thee a welcome. Thou camest into the desert a vender of salt. Thou shalt go forth an apostle of my alchemy. Wherever thou seest a heart bowed down in some Desert of Waiting, thou shalt whisper to it: 'Patience! Here, if thou wilt, in these arid sands, thou mayst find thy Garden of Omar, and from these daily tasks that prick thee sorest distil some precious attar to sweeten all life!' So, like the bee that led thee to my teaching, shalt thou lead others to hope."

"'Then Shapur went forth with the crystal vase, and his camel, healed in the long time of waiting, bore him swiftly across the sands to the City of his Desire. The Golden Gate, that would not have opened to the vender of salt, swung wide for the Apostle of Omar.

" 'Princes brought their pearls to exchange for his attar, and everywhere he went its sweetness opened for him a way and won for him a welcome. Wherever he saw a heart bowed down in some Desert of Waiting, he whispered Omar's words and tarried to teach Omar's alchemy, that from the commonest experiences of life may be distilled its greatest blessings.

" 'At his death, in order that men might not forget, he willed that his tomb should be made at a place where all caravans passed. There, at the crossing of the highways, he caused to be cut in stone that emblem of patience, the camel, kneeling on the sand. And it bore this inscription, which no one could fail to see, as he toiled past toward the City of his Desire:

" ' "Patience! Here, if thou wilt, on these arid sands, thou mayst find thy Garden of Omar, and even from the daily tasks which prick thee sorest mayst distil some precious attar to bless thee and thy fellow man."

" 'A thousand moons waxed and waned above it, then a thousand, thousand more, and there arose a generation with restless hearts, who set their faces ever westward, following the sun toward a greater City of Desire. Strange seas they crossed, new coasts they came upon. Some were satisfied with the fair valleys that tempted them to tarry, and built them homes where the fruitful hills whispered stay. But always the sons of Shapur pushed ahead, to pitch their tents a day's march nearer the City of their Desire, nearer the Golden Gate, which opened every sunset to let the royal Rajah of the Day pass through. Like a mirage that vision lured them on, showing them a dream gate of opportunity, always just ahead, yet ever out of reach.

" 'As in the days of Shapur, so it was in the days of his sons. There were those who fell by the way, and, losing all that made life dear, cried out as the caravan passed on without them that Allah had forgotten them; and they cursed the day that they were born, and laid hopeless heads in the dust.

" 'But Allah, the merciful, who from the beginning knew what Desert of Waiting must lie between every son of Shapur and the City of his Desire, had long before stretched out His hand over one of the mountains of His continent. With earthquake shock it sank before Him. With countless hammer-strokes of hail and rain-drops, and with gleaming rills he chiselled it, till, as the centuries rolled by, it took the semblance of that symbol of patience, a camel, kneeling there at the passing of the ways. And to every heart bowed down and hopeless, it whispers daily its message of cheer:

" ' "*Patience! Thou camest into the desert a vender of salt, thou mayst go forth an Alchemist, distilling from Life's tasks and sorrows such precious attar in thy soul that its sweetness shall win for thee a welcome wherever thou goest, and a royal entrance into the City of thy Desire!*" ' "

There was a long silence when Mr. Ellestad closed his note-book. Joyce had turned her face away to watch the mountain while he read, so he could not see whether the little tale pleased her or not. But suddenly a tear splashed down on the paper in her lap, and she drew her hand hastily across her eyes.

"You see, it seems as if you'd written that just for me," she said, trying to laugh. "I think it's beautiful! If ever there was a heart bowed down in a desert of waiting, I was that one when I came out here this afternoon. But you have given a new meaning to the mountain, Mr. Ellestad. How did you ever happen to think of it all?"

"A line from Sadi, one of the Persian poets, started me," he answered. " '*Thy alchemist, Con-*

tentment be.' It grew out of that — that and my own unrest and despondency."

"Look!" she cried, excitedly. "Do you see that? A bee! A bee buzzing around my head, as it did Shapur's, and I can't drive him away!"

She flapped at it with her handkerchief. "Oh, there it goes now. I wonder where it would lead us if we could follow it?"

"Probably to some neighbour's almond orchard," answered Mr. Ellestad.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Joyce. "I wish that there was a bee that I could follow, and a real rose garden that I could find. It sounds so beautiful and easy to say, 'Out of life's tasks and sorrows distil a precious attar in thy soul,' and I'd like to, heaven knows, but, when it comes to the point, how is one actually to go about it? If it were something that I could do with my hands, I'd attempt it gladly, no matter how hard; but doing the things in an allegory is like trying to take hold of the girl in the mirror. You can see her plainly enough, but you can't touch her. I used to feel that way about 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and think that if I only had a real pack on my back, as Christian had, and could start off on a real road, that I could be sure of what I was doing and the progress I was making. I wish you'd tell me how to begin really living up to your legend."

She spoke lightly, but there was a wistful glance in the laughing eyes she turned toward him.

"You will first have to tell me what is the City of your Desire."

"Oh, to be an artist! It has always been that. To paint beautiful pictures that will live long after I am gone, and will make people better and happier. Then the work itself would be such a joy to me. Ever since I have been old enough to realize that I will have to do something to earn my own living, I've hoped that I could do it in that way. I have had lessons from the best teachers we could get in Plainsville, and Cousin Kate took me to the finest art galleries in Europe, and promised to send me to the Art League in New York if I finished my high school course creditably.

"But we had to come out here, and that ended everything. I can't help saying, like Shapur, 'Why should I, with life beating strong in my veins, and ambition like a burning simoom in my breast, be left here helpless on the sands, where I can achieve nothing and make no progress toward the City of my Desire?' It seems especially hard to have all this precious time wasted, when I had counted so much on the money I expected to earn, — enough to keep mamma comfortable when she grows old, and to give the other children all sorts of advantages."

"And you do not believe that these 'arid sands' hold anything for you?" said Mr. Ellestad.

Joyce shook her head.

"It takes something more than a trained hand and a disciplined eye to make an artist," he answered, slowly. "Did you ever think that it is the soul that has to be educated? That the greater the man behind the brush, the greater the picture will be? Moses had his Midian before he was worthy to be 'Lawgiver' to his people. Israel had forty years of wilderness-wandering before it was fit for its Promised Land. David was trained for kingship, not in courts, but on the hillsides with his flocks.

"This is the secret of Omar's alchemy, to gather something from every person we meet, from every experience life brings us, as Omar gathered something from the heart of every rose, and out of the wide knowledge thus gained, of human weaknesses and human needs, to distil in our own hearts the precious oil of sympathy. That is the attar that will win for us a welcome wherever we go, — sympathy.

The quick insight and deep understanding that help us to interpret people. And nobody fills his crystal vase with it until he has been pricked by the world's disappointments and bowed by its tasks. No masterpiece was ever painted without it. A man may become a fine copyist, but he can never make anything live on canvas until he has first lived deeply himself.

"Do not think your days wasted, little friend. Where could you learn such lessons of patience and courage as here on this desert where so many come to die? Where could you grow stronger than in the faithful doing of your commonplace duties, here at home, where they all need you and lean upon you?

"You do not realize that, if you could go on now to the City of your Desire, the little you have to offer the world would put you in the rank of a common vender of salt, — you could only follow in the train of others. Is not waiting worth while, if it shall give you wares with which to win a *royal* entrance?"

"Oh, yes," answered Joyce, in a quick half-whisper, as the musical voice paused. She was looking away toward the mountain with a rapt expression on her uplifted face, as of one who sees visions. All the discontent had vanished now. It was glowing with hope and purpose.

As Mr. Ellestad rose to go, she turned impulsively to thrust both outstretched hands into his. "I can never thank you enough!" she exclaimed. "Old Camelback will be a constant inspiration to me after this instead of an emblem of hopelessness. *Please* come in and read the legend to mamma! And may I copy it sometime? Always now I shall think of you as *Omar*. I shall call you that in my thoughts."

"Thank you, little friend," he said, softly, as they walked on toward the house. "I have failed to accomplish many things in life that I had hoped to do, but the thought that one discouraged soul has called me its Omar makes me feel that I have not lived wholly in vain."

CHAPTER IX.

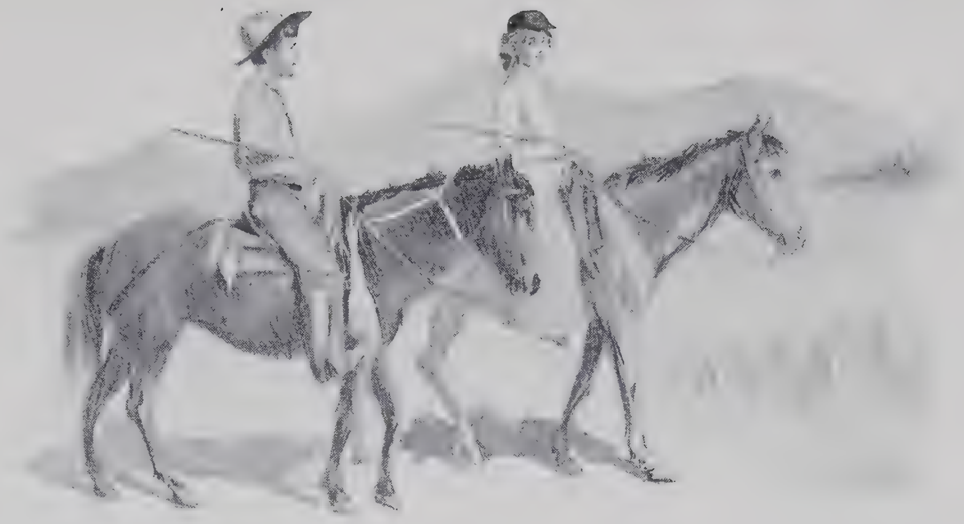
LLOYD'S DUCK HUNT

Meanwhile, Lloyd and Jack, riding along toward the river, were enjoying every moment of the sunny afternoon. Leaving the road at the White Bachelor's, they followed the trail across a strip of desert.

"Look out for gopher holes," called Jack. "If your horse should happen to stumble into one, you'll be over his head before you can say 'scat.' The little pests burrow everywhere."

As he spoke, his pony sprang to one side of the road with a suddenness that nearly threw him from the saddle.

"You old goose!" he exclaimed. "That was nothing but a stick you shied at. But it does look remarkably like a snake, doesn't it, Lloyd? That's the way with all these ponies. They're always on the watch for rattlers, and they'll shy at anything that looks the least bit like one."



"ENJOYING EVERY MOMENT OF THE SUNNY AFTERNOON"

"I didn't know that we'd find snakes out heah in this dry sand," said Lloyd, in surprise.

"Yes, you'll find almost anything if you know just where to look, — a whole menagerie. There are owls and snakes living together in the same holes. Wait! It looks as if there might be a nest of them yonder. I'll stir it up and see."

Leaving the trail, he rode up between a clump of sage-brush and greasewood bushes, and threw his hat with all his force toward a hole beneath them. A great, sleepy owl fluttered out, and sailed off with a slow flapping of wings to the shelter of a stubby mesquit farther on.

"If we had time to dig into the nest, we'd find a snake in there," declared Jack, hanging down from his saddle, cowboy fashion, to pick up his hat from the ground as he rode along. He could feel that Lloyd admired the easy grace with which he did it, and that she was interested in the strange things he had to tell about the desert. He was glad that Phil was not along, for Phil, with his three years' advantage in age and six inches in height, had a way of monopolizing attention that made Jack appear very young and insignificant. He resented being made to feel like a little boy when he was almost a year older than Lloyd and several inches taller.

This was the first time he had been out alone with her, and the first time that he had had a chance to show her that he could be entertaining when he tried. Joyce and Mary and Phil had always had so much to say that he had kept in the background.

The sun on Lloyd's hair made it gleam like sunshine itself, tucked up under her jaunty little hunting-cap. The exercise was bringing a deeper colour to the delicate wild-rose pink of her cheeks, and, as her eyes smiled mischievously up at him whenever he told some tale that seemed almost too big to believe, he decided that she was quite the nicest girl he had ever known, except Joyce, and fully as agreeable to go hunting with as any boy.

In that short trip he pointed out more strange things than she could have seen in a whole afternoon in the streets of Paris or London. There were the wonderful tiny trap-doors leading down into the silk-lined tunnels of the cunning trap-door spiders; the hairy tarantulas; the lizards; the burrows of the jack-rabbits; a trail made by the feet of coyotes on their way to the White Bachelor's poultry-yard.

Then he pointed out a great cactus, sixty feet high, branched like a candelabrum, and told her that the thorny trunk is like a great sealed cup, full of the purest water, and that more than one traveller has saved his life by boring into one of these desert wells when he was perishing of thirst.

He told her how the Navajo Indians hunt the prairie-dogs, sticking up a piece of mirror at the entrance to the mound, and lying in wait for the little creature to come out. When it meets its own reflection, and sees what it supposes to be a strange prairie-dog mocking it at its own front door, it hurries out to fight, and the Indian pins it to the ground with his arrow.

" Now, we'll have to go faster and make up for lost time," he exclaimed, as they left the desert and turned into a road leading to Tempe, a little town several miles away on Salt River. " There is an old ruin near this road, where the Indians had a fort of some kind, that I'd like to show you, but it's getting late, and we'd better hurry on to the river. Let's gallop."

Lloyd had enjoyed many a swift ride, but none that had been so exhilarating as this. The pure, fresh air blowing over the desert was unlike any she had ever breathed before, it seemed so much purer and more life-giving. It was a joy just to be alive on such a day and in such a place. She felt that she knew some of the delight a bird must feel winging its wild, free way through the trackless sky.

"I'd like to show you the town, too," Jack said, as they came to the ford in the river leading over to Tempe. "The Mexican quarter is so foreign-looking. But, as we're out to kill, we'll just keep on this side, and follow the river up-stream a piece. Chris said that is where he saw the ducks."

"Oh, I'd be the proudest thing that evah walked," she exclaimed, "if I could only shoot one. A peacock couldn't hold a candle to me. It would be worth the trip to Arizona just to do that, if I nevah did anothah thing. How I could crow ovah Malcolm and Rob. Oh, Jack, you haven't any idea how much I want to!"

"You shall have first pop at them," Jack answered. "You don't stand as good a show with that little rifle as I do. You'll have to wait till you get up just as close as possible."

Compared to the broad Ohio, which Lloyd was accustomed to seeing, Salt River did not look much wider than a creek. She was in a quiver of excitement when they turned the bend, and suddenly came in sight of the beautiful water-fowl. The ponies, trained to stand perfectly still wherever they were left, came to a sudden halt as the two excited hunters sprang off, and crept stealthily along the bank.

"They'll see your white sweater," cautioned Jack. "Stoop down, and sneak in behind the bushes."

"Then I'd bettah wait heah," returned Lloyd, "and you go on. I don't believe I could hit a bahn doah now, I'm in such a shake. I must have the 'buck ague.' If I bang into them, I'll just frighten them all away, and you won't get a shot."

It was a temptation to Jack to do as she urged. This was the first sight he had had of a duck since he had owned a gun, and the glint of the iridescent feathers as the pretty creatures circled and dived in the water made him tingle with the hunters' thrill.

"No," he exclaimed, as she insisted. "I brought you out here to shoot a duck, and I don't want to take you back without one."

"Then I'll get down and wiggle along in the sand so they can't see me," said Lloyd, "just like 'Lawless Dick, the Half-breed Huntah.' Isn't this fun!"

Crawling stealthily through the greasewood bushes, they crept inch by inch nearer the water, fairly holding their breath with excitement. Then Lloyd, rising to her knees, levelled her rifle to take aim. But her hands shook, and, lowering it, she turned to Jack, whispering, " I'm suah I'll miss, and spoil yoah chance. You shoot!"

" Aw, go on!" said Jack, roughly, forgetting, in his excitement, that he was not speaking to a boy. " Don't be a goose! You can hit one if you try!"

The commanding tone irritated Lloyd, but it seemed to steady her nerves, for, flashing an indignant glance at him, she raised her rifle again, and aimed it with deliberate coolness. *Bang!*

Jack, who knelt just beside her, prepared to fire the instant her shot should send a whir of wings into the air, gave a wild whoop, and dropped his gun.

" Hi!" he yelled. " You've hit it! See it floating over there! Wait a minute. I'll get it for you!"

Crashing through the bushes he ran back to where Washington stood waiting, and, swinging himself into the saddle, spurred him down the bank. But the pony, who had never balked before with him at any ford, seemed unwilling to go in.

"Hurry up, you old slow-poke!" called Jack. "Don't you see it's getting away?"

He succeeded in urging him into the middle of the river, where the water was almost up to the pony's body, but half-way across, the pony began to plunge, and turned abruptly about. Then his hind feet seemed to give way, and he went suddenly back on his haunches. At the same instant a gruff voice called from the bank, "Come out of that, you little fool! Don't you know there's quicksand there? Head your cayuse down the river! Quick! Spur him up! Do you want to drown yourself?"

With a desperate plunge and a flounder or two, the pony freed himself, and struggled back to safe ground, past the treacherous quicksand. As Jack reached the bank he saw the White Bachelor peering at him from the back of his white horse. He was evidently on the same mission, for he wore a hunting-coat, as brown and weather-beaten as his swarthy face, and carried an old gun on his shoulder.

"You'd have been sucked clean through to China, if you'd gone much farther over," he said, crossly. "That's one of the worst places in the river." Although his tone was savage, there was a pleasant gleam in his eyes as he added: "Too bad you've lost your duck."

"Haven't lost it yet," said Jack, with a glance toward the dark object floating rapidly down-stream. He kicked off his boots as he spoke.

"Oh, Jack, please don't go in after it!" begged Lloyd. "It isn't worth such a risk." The word quicksand had frightened her, for she had heard much of the dangerous spots in the rivers of this region.

"Bound to have it!" called Jack, "for you might not get another shot, and I'm bound not to take you back home without one."

Striking out into the water regardless of his sweater and heavy corduroy trousers, he paddled after it. By this time the entire flock was out of sight, and when Jack emerged from the river dripping like a water-dog, the man remarked, coolly: "Well, your hunt's up for this day, Buddy. Better skip home and hang yourself up to dry, or you'll be having pneumonia. Aren't you one of the kids that lives at that place where they've got Ware's Wigwam painted on the post, and all sorts of outlandish figgers on the tents?"

"Yes," acknowledged Jack, in a surly tone, resenting the name kid. Then, remembering the fate that the man's warning had saved him from, he added, gratefully: " It was lucky for me you yelled out quicksand just when you did, for I was so bent on getting that duck that I'd have kept on trying, no matter how the pony cut up. I thought he had taken a stubborn spell, and wanted to balk at the water. I'm a thousand times obliged. Here, Lloyd," he added. " Here's your trophy. We'll hang it on your saddle."

He held out the fowl, a beautifully marked drake, but she drew back with a little shrug of the shoulders.

" Oh, mercy, no!" she answered. " I wouldn't touch it for the world!"

" Haw! Haw!" roared the White Bachelor, who had watched her shrinking gesture with a grin. " Afraid of a dead duck!"

" I'm not!" she declared, turning on him, indignantly. " I'm not afraid of anything! But I just can't beah to touch dead things, especially with fu'h or feathahs on them. Ugh! It neahly makes me sick to think about it!"

" Well, if that don't beat the Dutch," said the man, in an amused tone, after a long stare. She seemed to be a strange species of womankind, with which he was unacquainted. Then, after another prolonged stare, he swung his heels against the sides of his old white horse as a signal to move, and ambled slowly off, talking to himself as he went.

"Meddlesome old thing!" muttered Lloyd, casting an indignant glance after him. "It's none of his business. I don't see what he wanted to poke in for."

"It was lucky for me that he did," answered Jack. "I never once thought of quicksand. Queer that I didn't, too, when I've heard so much about it ever since I came. It's all through Southern Arizona, and more than one man has lost his life blundering into it."

Lloyd grew serious as she realized the danger he had escaped. "It was mighty brave of you to go back into the rivah aftah you came so neah being drowned, and just fo' my pleasuah — just because you knew I wanted that duck. I'll remembah it always of you, Jack."

"Oh, that's nothing," he answered, carelessly, blushing to the roots of his wet hair. "When I once start out to get a thing, I hate to be beaten. I'd have swam all the way to Jericho rather than let it get away. But I hope you won't always think of me as sloshing around in the water, though I suppose you can't help that, for you know the first time you saw me I was over my elbows in a washtub."

"That's so," laughed Lloyd. "But you weren't quite as wet then as you are now. It's a pity you can't wring yourself as dry as you did those towels."

While Jack was tugging into his boots, she went back to the bushes for the gun he had dropped. Then she stood drawing out the loads while he tied the duck to his saddle.

"Poah thing," said Lloyd. "It looked so beautiful swimming around in the watah a few minutes ago. Now it's mate will be so lonesome. Papa Jack says wild ducks nevah mate again. Of co'se," she went on, slowly, "I'm proud to think that I hit it, but now that it's dead and I took it's life, I feel like a murdahah. Jack, I'm nevah going to kill anothah one as long as I live."

"But it isn't as if you'd done it just for sport," protested Jack. "They were meant for food. Wait till Joyce serves it for dinner, and you'll change your mind."

"No," she said, resolutely, "I'll keep my rifle for rattlesnakes and coyotes, in case I see any, and for tah'get practice, but I'm not going to do any moah killing of this kind. I'm glad that I got this one, though," she added, as she swung herself into the saddle. "I'll send grandfathah a feathah, and one to Mom Beck. They'll both be so proud. And I'll send one to Malcolm and one to Rob, and they'll both be so envious, to think that I got ahead of them."

"May I have one?" asked Jack, "just to keep to remember my first duck hunt?"

"Yes, of co'se!" cried Lloyd. "I wouldn't have had any myself, if it hadn't been for you. You have given me one of the greatest pleasuahs I evah had. This has been a lovely aftahnoon."

"Then I can count that quite a 'feather in my cap,' can't I," said Jack, laughingly. Reaching down, he selected the prettiest feather he could find, and thrust the long quill through his hatband. Lloyd glanced quickly at him. She would have expected such a complimentary speech from Malcolm or Phil, but coming from the quiet, matter-of-fact Jack, such a graceful bit of gallantry was a surprise.

"You can save the down for a sofa-cushion, you know," he added. "Even if you have sworn off shooting any more yourself, you can levy on all that Phil and I get, to finish it."

"Oh, thank you," she called back over her shoulder. Her pony, finding that he was turned homeward, was setting off at his best gait. Slapping his hat firmly on his head, Jack hurried to overtake her, and the two raced along neck to neck.

"This is how they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix," he called. "I recited it once at school!

"'Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace, —
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place.'"

"Isn't it glorious?" called back Lloyd. Her cheeks dimpled with pleasure, and were growing red as a sun-ripened peach from the exercise. Her hat-pin began slipping out. Snatching at the little cap, she caught it just in time to save it from sailing off into the desert, but her hair came slipping down over her shoulders to her waist, in soft, shining waves. Jack thought that he had never seen anything prettier than the little golden ripples in it, as it floated back behind her in the sunshine.

"You look like Goldilocks when the three bears chased her," he laughed. "Don't try to put it up again. That's squaw fashion. You ought to wear it that way all the time you're out here, if you want to be in style."

Across the road from the Wigwam, Mary and Norman were waiting for the return of the hunters. They had rolled a barrel from the back yard over to the edge of the desert, where they could watch the road, and, turning it on its side, had laid a plank across it, left from flooring the tents. On this they were seesawing up and down, taking turns at occupying the end which faced in the direction Jack and Lloyd would come. Mary happened to have the coveted seat when they came in sight.

"Gay go up, and gay go down," she chanted, as the seesaw rose and fell with delightful springiness. "All the way to London town." Norman was high in the air when she began again, "Gay go up," but it was anything but gay go down for Norman. With an unexpectedness that he was wholly unprepared for, Mary's chant ended with a whoop of "Here they come!" She sprang off, and ran to meet them, regardless of the other end of the plank. It fell with such a thud that Norman felt that his spinal column must certainly have become unjointed in the jolt, and his little white teeth shut down violently on his little red tongue.

His cries and Mary's shout of "Here they come" brought Joyce to the door. Mr. Ellestad was just leaving. She had prevailed upon him to read the legend to her mother, and then he had stayed on till sundown, discussing the different things that a girl might do on the desert to earn money. The story of Shapur had inspired her with a hope that made all things possible. She was glad that Lloyd's triumph gave her an outlet for her enthusiasm.

As soon as Mr. Ellestad left, she hustled Jack off to his mother's tent to change his wet clothes, and then started to build the fire for supper. "It's a pity that it's too dark for me to take a snap shot of you with that duck," she said. "But the first one that Jack or Phil kills we'll have a picture of it. It will do just as well. Then if I were you I'd make some little blotting-pads of white blotting-paper, put a blue-print on the top sheet, of you and your rifle and the duck, and at the top fasten one of the feathers made into a pen. You can split the end of the quill, you know, just as they used to make the old-fashioned goose-quill pens."

"So I can!" cried Lloyd. "I'm so glad you thought of it. Oh, Joyce, I've had the best time this aftahnoon! I had no idea the desert could be so interesting!"

"Nor I, either," began Joyce. "I'll tell you about it some other time," she added, as Holland burst in, demanding to see the duck that Lloyd had killed. Mary had run down the road to meet him with the news, but he stoutly declined to believe that a girl could have accomplished such a feat, until he had the proof of it in his hands. Then to Lloyd's delight he claimed the honour of picking it. She felt that she would rather throw it away than go through the ordeal herself, yet she could not impose such a task on any one else at such a late hour on a busy Saturday.

"Oh, if you only will," she cried, "I'll let you use my rifle all next Saturday. I didn't see how I could possibly touch it! That down is so thick undah the long outside feathahs, that it would be as bad as picking a — a *cat!*"

Holland ripped out a handful with a look of fine scorn. "Well, if you aren't the funniest!" he exclaimed. "Girls are awful finicky," he confided to Mary later. "I'm glad that I'm not one."

CHAPTER X.

THE SCHOOL OF THE BEES

WITH her slipper toes caught in the meshes of the hammock to keep her from falling out, and with her head hanging over nearly to the ground, Mary lay watching something beneath her, with breathless interest.

"What is it, Mary?" called Phil, as he came up and threw himself down on the grass beside her, in the shade of the bushy umbrella-tree.

She pointed to a saucer of sugar and water just below her, on the edge of which several bees had alighted. "I put it there," she said, in a low tone, as if afraid of disturbing the bees. "Mr. Ellestad has been telling us how smart they are, and I wanted to watch them do some of their strange things myself. He wants Joyce to raise bees instead of chickens or squabs or any of the things they were talking about doing. He came up after dinner with some books, and told us so much about them, that

I learned more than I would in a whole week in school. Joyce and Lloyd were so interested that, as soon as he left, they rode right over to Mr. Shaw's bee ranch to find out how much a hive costs, and all about it."

"Have they been gone long?" asked Phil, more interested in the girls than in the bees. Finding that they had been away more than an hour, and that it was almost time for their return, he settled himself to wait, feigning an interest almost as great as Mary's in the saucer of sugar and water. There was something comical to him always in Mary's serious moods, and the grave expression of the little round face, as it hung over the edge of the hammock, promised enough amusement to make the time pass agreeably.

"When one bee gets all he can carry, he goes and tells the others," explained Mary. "I've had six, so far. I suppose you know about Huber," she asked, looking up eagerly. "I didn't till Mr. Ellestad read us a lot about him out of one of the books he brought."

"I've heard of him," answered Phil, smiling, as he saw how much she wanted the pleasure of repeating her newly gained knowledge. "Suppose you tell me."

" Well, he was born in Switzerland — in Geneva, and when Lloyd found that out, she was ready to read anything he had written, or to study anything he was interested in. She just loves Geneva. That was where she met the major who gave her Hero, her Red Cross war-dog, you know, and that is where he saved her life, by stopping a runaway horse.

" Well, Huber went blind when he was just a boy, and he would have had a terribly lonesome time if it hadn't been for the bees. He began to study them, and they were so interesting that he went on studying them his whole life. He had somebody to help him, of course, who watched the hives, and told him what went on inside, and he found out more about them than anybody had ever done before, and wrote books about them. It is two hundred years since then, and a whole library has been written about bees since then, but his books are still read, and considered among the best.

" Holland said, Pooh! the bees couldn't teach *him* anything. He'd just as soon go to a school of grasshoppers, and that I'd be a goose if I spent my time watching 'em eat sugar and water out of a dish. He was going off fishing with George Lee. He wouldn't wait to hear what Mr. Ellestad had to say. But all the fish in the canal wouldn't do me as much good as one thing I learned from the bees."

"What was that?" asked Phil, lazily, stretching himself out full length on the grass, and pulling his hat over his eyes.

"Sometimes it happens that something gets into the hives that don't belong there; like a slug. Once a mouse got in one, and it told in the book about a child dropping a snail in one. Well, the bees can sting such things to death, but they're not strong enough to drag them out after they're dead, and if the dead bodies stayed in the hives they'd spoil everything after awhile. So the bees just cover them all over with wax, make an air-tight cell, and seal them up in it. Isn't that smart? Then they just leave it there and go off about their business, and forget about it. Mr. Ellestad said that's what people ought to do with their troubles that can't be cured, but have to be endured. They ought to seal them up tight, and stop talking and fretting about them — keep them away from the air, he said, seal them up so they won't poison their whole life. That set me to thinking about the trouble that is poisoning my happiness, and I made up my mind I'd pretend it was just a snail that had crept into my hive. I can't change it, I can't drag it out, but I won't let it spoil all my honey."

"Well, bless my soul!" exclaimed Phil, sitting up very straight, and looking at her with an interest that was unfeigned this time. "What trouble can a child like you have, that is so bad as all that?"

"Won't you ever tell?" said Mary, "and won't you ever laugh at me?" She was eager to unburden her soul, but afraid of appearing ridiculous in the eyes of her hero. "Well, it's being so fat! I've always wanted to be tall and slender and willowy, like the girls in books. I always play I am, when Patty and I go off by ourselves at recess. I have such good times then, but when I come back the boys call me Pudding, and Mother Bunch and *Gordo*. I think that is Spanish for *fat*. My face is just as round as a full moon, and my waist — well, Holland calls me *Chautauqua*, and that's Indian for bag-tied-in-the-middle. There isn't a girl in school that has such legs as mine. I can barely reach around them with both hands."

She pulled her short gingham skirt farther over her knees as she spoke, and stole a side glance at Phil to see if he were taking as serious a view of her troubles as the situation demanded. He was staring straight ahead of him with a very grave face, for he had to draw it into a frown to keep from laughing outright.

"I'd give anything to be like Lloyd," she continued. "She's so straight and graceful, and she holds her head like a real princess. But she grew up that way, I suppose, and never did have a time of being dumpy like me. They used to call her 'airy, fairy Lillian' when she was little, because she was so light on her feet."

"They might well call her that now," remarked Phil, looking toward the road down which she was to appear. Mary, about to plunge into deeper confidences, saw the glance, and saw that he had shifted his position in order to watch for the coming of the girls. She felt that he was not as interested as she had supposed. Maybe he wouldn't care to hear how she stood every day in the tent before the mirror, to hold her shoulders as Lloyd did, or throw back her head in the same spirited way. Maybe he wouldn't understand. Maybe he would think her vain and silly and a copy-cat, as Holland called her. Lloyd would not have rattled on the way she had been doing. Oh, why had she been born with such a runaway tongue!

Covered with confusion, she sat so long without speaking that Phil glanced at her, wondering at the unusual silence. To his surprise there was an expression of real distress on the plump little face, and the gray eyes were winking hard to keep back the tears.

"So that is the trouble, is it?" he said, kindly, not knowing what was in her thought. "Well, it's a trouble you'll probably outgrow. I used to go to school with a girl that was nicknamed Jumbo, because she weighed so much, and she grew up to be as tall and slim as a rail; so you see there is hope for you. In the meantime, you are a very sensible little girl to take the lesson of the bees to heart. Just seal up your trouble, and don't bother your head about it, and be your own cheerful, happy little self. People can't help loving you when you are that way, and they don't want you to be one mite different."

Phil felt like a grandfather as he gave this bit of advice. He did not see the look of supreme happiness which crossed Mary's face, for at that moment the girls came riding up to the house, and he sprang up to meet them.

"I'll unsaddle the ponies," he said, taking the bridles as the girls slid to the ground, and starting toward the pasture. By the time he returned, Mary had carried some chairs out to the hammock, and Joyce had brought a pitcher of lemonade.

"Come, drink to the success of my new undertaking," she called. "It's all so far off in the future that mamma says I'm counting my chickens before they are hatched, but — I'm going into the bee business, Phil. Mr. Shaw will let me have a hive of gold-banded Italian bees for eight dollars. I don't know when I'll ever earn that much money, but I'll do it some day. Then that hive will swarm, and the new swarms will swarm, and with the honey they make I'll buy more hives. There is such a long honey-making time every year in this land of flowers, that I'll be owning a ranch as big as Mr. Shaw's some day, see if I don't! I always wanted a garden like Grandmother Ware's, with a sun-dial and a beehive in it, just for the artistic effect, but I never dreamed of making a fortune out of it."

"And I intend to get some hives as soon as I go back to Locust," said Lloyd. "It will be the easiest way in the world to raise money for ou' Ordah of Hildegarde. That's the name of the club I belong to," she explained to Phil. "One of its objects is to raise money for the poah girls in the mountain schools. We get so tiahed of the evahlasting embroidery and fancy work, and, as Mr. Ellestad says, this is so interesting, and one can learn so much from the bees."

"That's what Mary was telling me," said Phil, gravely. "But I must confess I never got much out of them. I investigated them once when I was a small boy — stirred up the hive with a stick, and by the time I was rescued I was pretty well puffed up. Not with a sense of my wisdom, however. They stung me nearly to death. So I've rather shrunk from having any more dealings with them."

"You can't deny that they gave you a good lesson in minding your own business," laughed Lloyd.

"Well, I don't care to have so many teachers after me, all teaching me the same thing. I prefer variety in my instructors."

"They don't all teach the same thing," cried Joyce, enthusiastically. "I had no idea how the work was divided up until I began to study them. People have watched them through glass hives, you know, with black shutters. They have nurses to tend the nymphs and larvæ, and ladies of honour, who wait on the queen, and never let her out of their sight. And isn't it odd, they are exactly like human beings in one thing, they never turn their back on the queen. Then there are the house bees, who both air and heat the hives by fanning their wings, and sometimes they help to evaporate the honey in the same way, when there is more water in the flower nectar than usual. There are architects, masons, waxworkers, and sculptors, and the foragers, who go out to the flowers for the pollen and nectar. Some are chemists, who let a drop of formic acid fall from the end of their stings to preserve the honey, and some are capsule makers, who seal down the cells when the honey is ripe. Besides all these are the sweepers, who spend their time sweeping the tiny streets, and the bearers, who remove the corpses, and the amazons of the guard, who watch by the threshold night and day, and seem to require some kind of a countersign of all who pass, just like real soldiers. Some are artists, too, as far as knowing colours is concerned. They get red pollen from the mignonette, and yellow pollen from the lilies, and they never mix them. They always store them in separate cells in the storerooms."

"Whew!" whistled Phil, beginning to fan himself with his hat as Joyce paused. "Anything more? It takes a girl with a fad to deluge a fellow with facts."

"Tell him about the drones," said Lloyd, meaningly. She resented being laughed at. "*They* don't like the school of the bees eithah. If Aristotle and Cato and Pliny and those old philosophahs could spend time studying them, *you* needn't tuh'n up yoah nose at them!"

Lloyd turned away indignantly, but she looked so pretty with her eyes flashing, and the colour coming up in her cheeks, that Phil was tempted to keep on teasing them about their fad, as he called it. His antagonism to it was all assumed at first, but he began to feel a real resentment as the days wore on. It interfered too often with his plans. Several times he had walked up to the ranch to find Mr. Ellestad there ahead of him with a new book on bee culture, or an interesting account of some new experiment, or some ride was spoiled because, when he called, the girls had gone to Shaw's ranch to spend the afternoon.

Joyce and Lloyd purposely pointed all their morals, and illustrated all their remarks whenever they could, by items learned at the School of the Bees, until Phil groaned aloud whenever the little honey-makers were mentioned.

"If you had been Shapur you nevah would have followed that bee to the Rose Garden of Omah, would you?" asked Lloyd, one day when they had been discussing the legend of Camelback.

"No," answered Phil, "nothing could tempt me to follow one of those irritating little creatures."

"Not even to reach the City of yoah Desiah?"

"My City of Desire would have been right in that oasis, probably, if I had been Shapur. The story said, 'Water there was for him to drink, and the fruit of the date-palm.' He had everything to make him comfortable, so what was the use of going around with an ambition like a burning simoom in his breast."

"I don't believe that you have a bit of ambition," said Lloyd, in a disapproving tone that nettled Phil. "Have you?"

"I can't say that it keeps me awake of nights," laughed Phil. "And I can't see that anybody is any happier or more comfortable for being all torn up over some impossible thing he is for ever reaching after, and never can get hold of."

"Neahly everybody I know is like Shapur," said Lloyd, musingly. "Joyce is wild to be an artist, and Betty to write books, and Holland to go into the navy, and Jack to be at the head of the mines. Papa has promised him a position in the mine office as soon as he learns Spanish, and he is pegging away at it every spare minute. He says Jack will make a splendid man, for it is his great ambition to be just like his fathah, who was so steady-going and reliable and honahable in all he undahtook, that he had the respect of everybody. Papa says Jack will make just the kind of man that is needed out heah to build up this new country, and he expects great things of him some day. He says that a boy who is so faithful in small things is bound to be faithful to great ones of public trust."

"What is your City of Desire?" asked Phil, who did not relish the turn the conversation had taken. He liked Jack, but he didn't want Lloyd to sing his praises so enthusiastically.

"Oh, I'm only a girl without any especial talent," answered Lloyd, "so I can't expect to amount to as much as Joyce and Betty. But I want to live up to our club motto, and to leave a Road of the Loving Heart behind me in everybody's memory, and to be just as much like mothah and my beautiful Grandmothah Amanthis as I can. A home-makah, grandfathah says, is moah needed in the world than an artist or an authah. He consoles me that way sometimes, when I feel bad because I can't do the things I'd like to. But it is about as hard to live up to his ideal of a home-makah, as to reach any othah City of Desiah. He expects so much of me."

"But what would your ambition be if you were a boy?" asked Phil, lazily leaning back in the hammock to watch her.

"If I were a boy," she repeated. A light leaped up into her face, and unconsciously her head took its high, princesslike pose. "If I were a boy, and could go out into the world and do all sawts of fine things, I wouldn't be content to sit down beside the well and the palm-tree. I'd want something to do that was hard and brave, and that would try my mettle. I'd want to fight my way through all sawts of dangahs and difficulties. I couldn't beah to be nothing but a drone, and not have any paht in the world's hive-making and honey-making."

"Look here," said Phil, his face flushing, "you girls are associating with bees entirely too much. You're learning to sting."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW BOARDER AT LEE'S RANCH

MARY could hardly wait to tell the news to Phil and Mrs. Lee. She ran nearly all the way from the Wigwam to the ranch, her hat in her hand, and the lid of her lunch-basket flapping.

Long before she came within calling distance, she saw Phil mount his horse out by the pasture bars, and ride slowly along the driveway which led past the tents to the public road. With the hope of intercepting him, she dashed on still more wildly, but her shoe-strings tripped her, and she was obliged to stop to tie them. Glancing up as she jerked them into hard knots, she breathed a sigh of relief, for he had drawn rein to speak to Mr. Ellestad and the new boarder, who were sitting in the sun near the bamboo-arbour. Then, just as he was about to start on again, Mrs. Lee came singing out to the tents with an armful of clean towels, and he called to her some question, which brought her, laughing, to join the group.

Thankful for these two delays, Mary went dashing on toward them so breathlessly that Phil gave a whistle of surprise as she turned in at the ranch.

"What's the matter, Mary?" he called. "Indians after you again?"

"No," she panted, throwing herself down on the dry Bermuda grass, and wiping her flushed face on her sleeve. "I'm on my way to school. I just stopped by with a message, and I thought you'd like to hear the news."

"Well, that depends," began Phil, teasingly. "We hear so little out on this lonely desert, that our systems may not be able to stand the shock of anything exciting. If it's good news, maybe we can bear it, if you break it to us gently. If it's bad, you'd better not run any risks. 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise,' you know."

"Oh, come now, Tremont, that's too bad," laughed Mr. Ellestad. "Don't head her off that way when she's in such a hurry to tell it."

"Then go on, Mary," said Phil, gravely. "Mr. Ellestad's curiosity is greater than his caution, and Mr. Armond hasn't been in the desert long enough to be affected by its dearth of news, so anything sudden can't hurt him. Go on."

Mary stole a glance at the new boarder. The long, slender fingers, smoothing his closely clipped, pointed beard, hid the half-smile that lurked around his mouth. He was leaning back in his camp-chair, apparently so little interested in his surroundings, that Mary felt that his presence need not be taken into account any more than the bamboo-arbour's.

"Well," she said, as if announcing something of national importance, "*Joyce has an order.*"

"An order," repeated Phil, "what under the canopy is that? Is it catching?"

"Don't pay any attention to him, Mary," Mr. Ellestad hastened to say, seeing a little distressed pucker between her eyes. "Phil is a trifle slow to understand, but he wants to hear just as much as we do."

"Well, it's an order to paint some cards," explained Mary, speaking very slowly and distinctly in her effort to make the matter clear to him. "You know the Links, back in Plainsville, Mrs. Lee. You've heard me talk about Grace Link ever so many times. Her cousin Cecelia is to be married soon, and her bridesmaids are all to be girls that she studied music with at the Boston Conservatory. So her Aunt Sue, that's Mrs. Link, is going to give her a bridal musicale. It's to be the finest entertainment that ever was in Plainsville, and they want

Joyce to decorate the souvenir programmes. Once she painted some place cards for a Valentine dinner that Mrs. Link gave. She did that for nothing, but Mrs. Link has sent her ten dollars in advance for making only thirty programmes. That's thirty cents apiece.

"They're to have Cupids and garlands of roses and strings of hearts on 'em, no two alike, and bars of music from the wedding-marches and bridal chorus. Joyce is the happiest thing! She's nearly wild over it, she's so pleased. She's going to buy a hive of bees with the money."

Phil groaned, but Mary paid no attention to the interruption.

"The letter and the package of blank cards for the programmes came this morning while she was sweeping, and she just left the dirt and the broom right in the middle of the floor, and sat down on the door-step and began sketching little designs on the back of the envelope, as they popped into her head. Lloyd and Jack and mamma are going to do all the cooking and housework and everything, so Joyce can spend all her time on the cards. They want them right away. Isn't that splendid?"

"Whoop-la!" exclaimed Phil, as Mary stopped, out of breath. "Fortune has at last changed in your favour. I'll ride straight up to the Wigwam to congratulate her."

"Oh, I almost forgot what I stopped by for," exclaimed Mary. "Lloyd told me to tell you that you needn't come to-day to take her riding, for she'll be too busy helping Joyce to go."

Phil scowled. "The turn in *my* fortune isn't so favourable, it seems. Well, if I'm not wanted at the Wigwam I'll go to town to-day. There's always something doing in Phœnix. Climb up behind me, Mary, and I'll give you a lift as far as the schoolhouse."

As they galloped gaily down the road, Mrs. Lee looked after them with a troubled expression in her eyes. "There's too much doing in Phœnix for a nice boy like that," she thought. "I wish he wouldn't go so often. I must tell him the experience some of my other boys have had when they went in with idle hands and full purses like his."

Her boarders were always her boys to Mrs. Lee, and she watched over them with motherly interest, not only nursing them in illness and cheering them in homesickness, but many a time whispering a warning against the temptations which beset all exiles from home who have nothing to do but kill time. Now with the hope of interesting the new boarder in something beside himself, she dropped down into the rustic seat near him, hanging the towels over the arm of it while she talked.

"You must make the acquaintance of the Wares, Mr. Armond," she began. "They stayed at the ranch three weeks, and this little Mary and her brothers kept things humming, the whole time."

"They'd give me nervous prostration in half a day, if they're all like that little chatterbox," he answered, listlessly.

"Not Joyce," interrupted Mr. Ellestad. "She's the most interesting child of her age I ever knew, and being an artist yourself you couldn't fail to be interested in her unbounded ambition. She really has talent, I think. For a girl of fifteen her clever little water-colours and her pen-and-ink work show unusual promise."

"Then I'm sorry for her," said Mr. Armond. "If she has ambition and thinks she has talent, life will be twice as hard for her, always a struggle, always an unsatisfied groping after something she can never reach."

"But I believe that she will reach what she wants, some day," was the reply. "She has youth and health and unbounded hope. The other day I quoted an old Norwegian proverb, '*He waits not long who* *waits for a feast.'* She wrote it on the kitchen door, saying, 'I'll have to wait till I can earn enough money to buy one hive of bees, and then I'll wait for that hive to swarm and make another, and for the two to grow into a hundred, and that into two hundred maybe, before I'll have enough to go away and study. It'll be years and years before I reach the mark I've set for myself, but when I'm really an artist, doing the things I've dreamed of doing, that will be a feast worth any amount of waiting.' Now in less than a week she has found her way to the first step, the first hive of bees, and I'm truly glad for her."

"But the happier such beginnings, the more tragic the end, oftentimes," Mr. Armond answered. "I've known such cases, — scores of them, when I was an art student myself in Paris. Girls and young fellows who thought they were budding geniuses. Who left home and country and everything else for art's sake. They lived in garrets, and slaved and struggled and starved on for years, only to find in the end that they were not geniuses, only to face failure. I never encourage beginners any more. For what is more cruel than to say to some hungry soul, 'Go on, wait, you'll reach the feast, your longing shall be satisfied,' when you know full well that in only one case in ten thousand, perhaps, can there be a feast for one of them. That when they stretch out their hands for bread there will be only a stone."

"But you reached it yourself, Armond, you know you did," answered Mr. Ellestad, who had known the new boarder well in his younger days. "To have had pictures hung in the Salon and Academy, to be recognized as a success in both hemispheres, isn't that enough of a feast to satisfy most men?"

The face turned to him in reply wore the look of one who has fought the bitterest of fights and fallen vanquished.

"No. To have a sweet snatched away just as it is placed to one's lips is worse than never to have tasted it. What good does it do me now? Look at me, a hopeless invalid, doomed to a year or two of unendurable idleness. How much easier it would be for me now to fold my hands and wait, if I had no baffled ambitions to torment me hourly, no higher desires in life than Chris there."

He pointed to the swarthy Mexican, digging a ditch across the alfalfa pasture. "No," he repeated. "I'd never encourage any one, now, to start on such an unsatisfactory quest."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Ellestad. "When I heard that you were coming, I hoped that you would take an interest in Joyce Ware. You could be the greatest inspiration and help to her, if you only would."

"There she is now," exclaimed Mrs. Lee, who sat facing the road. "It does me good to see any one swing along as she does, with so much energy and purpose in every movement."

Mr. Armond turned his head slightly for a view of the girlish figure moving rapidly toward them.

"Don't tell her that I am an artist, Ellestad," he said, hurriedly, as she drew near, "or that I've ever lived in the Latin Quarter or — or anything like that. I know how schoolgirls gush over such things, and I'm in no mood for callow enthusiasms."

Joyce's errand was to borrow some music, the wedding-marches, if Mrs. Lee had them, from Lohengrin and Tannhauser. She remembered seeing several old music-books on the organ in the adobe parlour, and she thought maybe the selections she wanted might be in them.

Mr. Armond sat listening to the conversation with as little interest, apparently, as he had done to Mary's. After acknowledging his introduction to Joyce by a grave bow, he leaned back in his chair, and seemed to withdraw himself from notice.

At first glance Joyce had been a trifle embarrassed by the presence of this distinguished-looking stranger. Something about him — the cut of the short, pointed beard, the nervous movement of his long, sensitive fingers, the eyes that seemed to see so much and so deeply in their brief glances, recalled some memory, vague and disturbing. She tried to remember where it was she had seen some man who looked like this one.

"Is it very necessary that you should have the wedding-marches?" asked Mrs. Lee, coming back from a fruitless search in the parlour. "Wouldn't a few bars from any other music do just as well? So long as you have some notes, I should think any other march would carry out the idea just as well."

"No," said Joyce. "All the guests will be musicians. They'd see at a glance if it wasn't appropriate, and ordinary music would not mean anything in such a place."

"I know where you can get what you want," said Mrs. Lee, "but you'd have to go to Phœnix for it. I have a friend there who is a music-teacher and an organist. I'll give you a note to her, if you care enough to go six miles."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Lee," cried Joyce. "I'll be glad to take it, if it isn't too much trouble for you to write it. I'd go twenty miles rather than not have the right notes on the programmes."

Mr. Armond darted a quick glance at her through half-closed eyelids. Evidently she was more in earnest than he had supposed.

As Mrs. Lee went to the house to write the note, Mr. Ellestad said, smilingly, "Mary told us that this piece of good fortune will bring you your first hive of bees, give you your first step toward the City of your Desire. It seems appropriate that this bridal musicale should give you your hives. Did you ever hear that the bow of the Hindu love-god is supposed to be strung with wild bees?"

"No," she answered, slowly, "but it's a pretty idea, isn't it?" Then her face lighted up so brightly that Mr. Armond looked at her with awakening interest.

"Oh, I'm so glad you told me that! It suggests such a pretty design. See! I can make one card like this." Taking a pencil from her hair, where she had thrust it when she started on her errand, and catching up the old music-book Mrs. Lee had brought out, she began sketching rapidly on a fly-leaf.

"I'll have a little Cupid in this corner, his bow strung with tiny bees, shooting across this staff of music, suspended from two hearts. And instead of notes I'll make bees, flying up and down between the lines. Won't that be fine?"

Mr. Armond nodded favourably when the sketch was passed to him. "Very good," he said, looking at it critically. Slipping a pencil from his pocket, he held it an instant over the little fat Cupid, as if to make some correction or suggestion, but apparently changing his mind, he passed the sketch back to Joyce without a word.

Again she was baffled by that vague half-memory. The gesture with which he had taken the pencil from his pocket and replaced it seemed familiar. The critical turn of his head, as he looked at the sketch, was certainly like some one's she knew. She liked him in spite of his indifference. Something in his refined, melancholy face made her feel sorry for him; sorrier than she had been for any of the other people at the ranch. He looked white and ill, and the spells of coughing that seized him now and then seemed to leave him exhausted.

When Mrs. Lee came out with the note, Joyce rose to go. She had learned in the short conversation with Mr. Ellestad that this stranger was an old acquaintance of his, so she said, hospitably, "We are your nearest neighbours, Mr. Armond. I know from experience how monotonous the desert is till one gets used to it. Whenever you feel in need of a change we'll be glad to see you at the Wigwam. It's always lively there, now."

He thanked her gravely, and Mr. Ellestad added, with a laugh, "He is just at the point now where Shapur was when the caravan went on without him. He doesn't think that these arid sands can hold anything worth while."

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Joyce, with an understanding note in her voice. "It's dreadful until you follow the bee, and find your Omar. You must tell him about it, Mr. Ellestad."

Then she hurried away. Half an hour later she galloped by on the pony, toward Phœnix. Lloyd was riding beside her. As they passed the ranch she waved a greeting with the note which Mrs. Lee had given her.

"What do you think of her work?" asked Mr. Ellestad of his friend.

"One couldn't judge from a crude outline like that," was the answer. "She's so young that it is bound to be amateurish. Still she certainly shows originality, and she has a capacity for hard work. Her willingness to go all the way to Phœnix for a few bars of music shows that she has the right stuff in her. But I wouldn't encourage her if I were in your place."

When Mr. Ellestad called at the Wigwam that afternoon, he found Joyce hard at work. A row of finished programmes was already stretched out on the table before her. Through the door that opened into the kitchen, he could see Lloyd at the ironing-board. Her face was flushed, and there was an anxious little frown between her eyes, because the wrinkles wouldn't come out of the sheets, and the hot irons had scorched two towels in succession. But she rubbed away with dogged persistence, determined to finish all that was left in the basket, despite Joyce's pleading that she should stop.

"Those things can wait till the last of the week just as well as not," she insisted. But Lloyd was unyielding.

"No, suh," she declared. "I nevah had a chance to i'on even a pocket-handkerchief befoah, and I'm bound I'll do it, now I've begun."

There was a blister on one pink little palm, and a long red burn on the back of her hand, but she kept cheerfully on until the basket was empty.

"Tell me about Mr. Armond," said Joyce, as she worked. "He reminds me of some one I've seen.

I've been trying all afternoon to think. You've known him a long time, haven't you?"

"Yes, I met him abroad when he was a mere boy," answered Mr. Ellestad, wishing that he had not been asked to say nothing about his friend's career as an artist. The tale of his experiences and successes would have been of absorbing interest to Joyce.

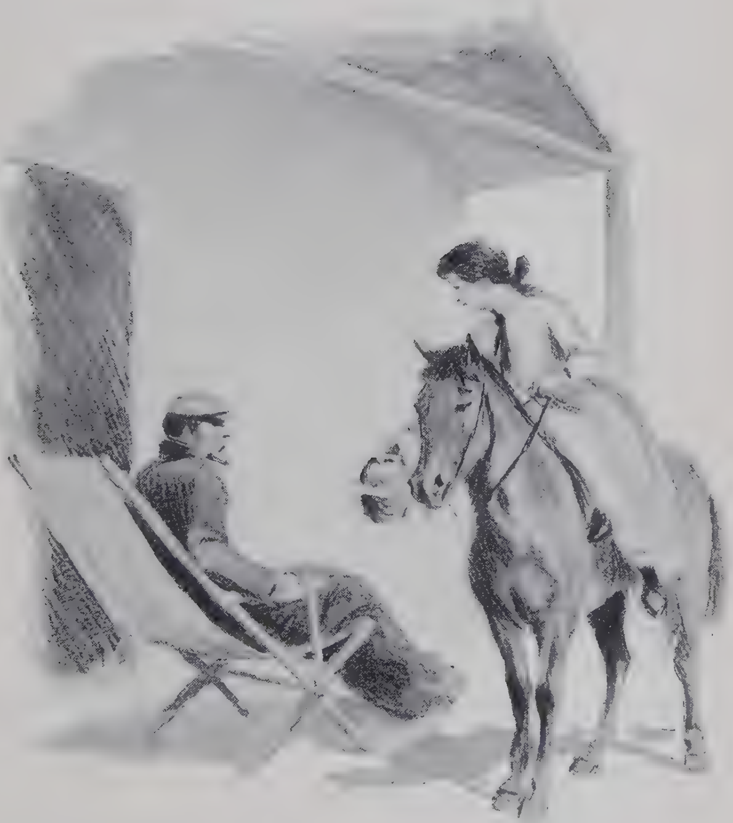
"Armond doesn't like to have his past discussed," he said, after a pause. "He made a brilliant success of it until his health failed several years ago. Since then he has grown so morose that he is not like the same creature. He has lost faith in everything. I tell him that if he would rouse himself to take some interest in people and things about him, — if he'd even read, and get his mind off of himself, then he'd quit cursing the day he was born, and pick up a little appetite. Then he would live longer. If he were at some sanitarium they'd make him eat; but here he won't go to the table half the time. Jo fixes up all sorts of tempting extras for him, but he just looks at them, and shoves them aside without tasting. The only thing I have heard him express a wish for since he has been at the ranch is quail."

"Oh, we're going to have some for supper to-night," cried Joyce. "Jack shot seven yesterday. He gets some nearly every day. I'll send Mr. Armond one if you think he'd like it. That is, if they turn out all right. My cooking isn't always a success, especially when my mind is on something like this work."

Everybody in the family helped to get supper that night, even Norman, so that Joyce might work on undisturbed till the last moment. The only part that she took in the preparations was to superintend the cooking of the quail, and to call out directions to the others, as she painted garlands of roses and sprays of orange-blossoms on one programme after another.

"Spread one of the white fringed napkins out in the little brown covered basket, Mary, please, and put in a knife and fork. And Lloyd, I wish you'd set a saucer on the stove hearth where it'll get almost red-hot. Jack, if you'll have the pony ready at the door I'll fly down to Mr. Armond with a quail the minute they are done, so that he'll get it piping hot. No, I'll take it myself, thank you. You boys are as hungry as bears, and I've painted so hard all afternoon that I haven't a bit of appetite. I'll feel more like eating if I have the ride first."

The ranch supper-bell was ringing as she started



"SHE LEANED OVER TO OFFER HIM THE LITTLE BASKET"

down the road on a gallop, holding the basket carefully in one hand, and guiding the pony with the other. Everybody had gone in to the dining-room but Mr. Armond. Wrapped in a steamer-rug and overcoat, he sat just outside the door of his tent, his hat pulled down over his eyes. Turning from the driveway she rode directly across the lawn toward him. She was bareheaded, and her face was glowing, not only from the rapid ride, but the kindly impulse that prompted her coming.

He looked up in astonishment as she leaned over to offer him the little basket.

"I've brought you a quail, Mr. Armond," she said, breathlessly. "You must eat it quick, while it's blazing hot, and eat it every bit but the bones, for it was cooked on purpose for you. It'll do you good."

Without an instant's pause she started off again, but he called her. "Wait a moment, child. I haven't thanked you. Ellestad said you were working at your programmes like a Trojan, and wouldn't stop long enough to draw a full breath. You surely haven't finished them."

"No, it will take nearly two days longer," she said, gathering up the reins again.

"And you stopped in the middle of it to do this for me!" he exclaimed. "I certainly appreciate your taking so much time and trouble for me — an entire stranger."

"Oh, no! You're not a stranger," she protested. "You're Mr. Ellestad's friend."

"Then may I ask one more favour at your hands? I'd like to see your programmes when they're finished, — before you send them away. There is so little to interest one out here," he continued, apologetically, "that if you don't mind humouring an invalid's whims — "

"Oh, I'd be glad to," cried Joyce, flushing. "I'll bring them down just as soon as they're done. That is," she added, with a mischievous smile dimpling her face, which made her seem even younger than she was, "if you'll be good, and eat every bit of the quail."

"I'll promise," he replied, an answering smile lighting his face for an instant. An easy promise to keep, he thought, as he lifted the lid, and took out the hot covered dish. The quail on the delicately browned toast was the most tempting thing he had seen in weeks.

"What a kind little soul she is," he said to himself, as he tasted the first appetizing morsel, "fairly brimming over with consideration for other people.

As Ellestad says, I could do a lot for her, if it seemed the right thing to encourage her."

Whether it was the quail, which he ate slowly, enjoying it to the last mouthful, or whether it was the remembrance of a pair of honest, friendly eyes, beaming down on him with neighbourly good-will and sympathy, he could not tell, but as he went into his tent afterward and lighted the lamp, somehow the desert seemed a little less lonely, the outlook a trifle less hopeless.

CHAPTER XII.

PHIL HAS A FINGER IN THE PIE

Phil went up to the Wigwam early next morning. Breakfast was just over, and Joyce had begun painting again. He paused an instant at the front door to watch her brown head bending over the table, and the quick motion of her deft fingers. She was so absorbed in her task that she did not look up, so after a moment he went on around the house to the kitchen.

Mrs. Ware was lifting the dish-pan from its nail to its place on the table, and Lloyd was standing beside her, enveloped in a huge apron, holding a towel in her hands, ready to help. Norman, beside a chair on which a clean napkin had been spread, was filling the salt-cellars. Jack, having carried water to the tents, was busy chopping wood.

"Good mawning!" called Lloyd, waving her towel as Phil appeared in the door. Mrs. Ware turned with such a cordial smile of welcome, that he took it as an invitation to come in, and hung his hat on the post of a chair.

"I want to have a finger in this pie," he announced. "I was told to stay at home yesterday, but I don't intend to be snubbed to-day.

"Wait, Aunt Emily, that kettle is too heavy for you!"

He had called her Aunt Emily since the first time he had heard Lloyd do it. "You don't care, do you?" he had asked. "It makes a fellow feel so forlorn and familyless when he has to mister and madam everybody." She was sewing a button on his coat for him at the time he asked her, and she gave such a pleased assent that he stooped to leave a light kiss on the smooth forehead where gray hair was beginning to mingle with the brown.

Now he took the kettle from her before she could object, and began pouring the boiling water into the pan. "Let me do this," he insisted. "I haven't had a hand in anything of the sort since I was a little shaver. It makes me think of a time when the servants were all away, and Stuart and I helped Aunt Patricia. She paid us in peppermint sticks and cinnamon drops."

"You'll get no candy here," she answered, laughing. "You might as well go on if that's what you expect." But there was no resisting the coaxing ways of this big handsome boy, who towered above her, and who took possession in such a masterful way of her apron and dish-mop. His coat and cuffs were off the next instant, and he began clattering the china and silverware vigorously through the hot soap-suds.

Mrs. Ware, taking a big yellow bowl in her lap, sat down to pick over some dried beans, and to enjoy the lively conversation which kept pace with the rattle of the dishes. It was interrupted presently by a complaint from Lloyd.

" Aunt Emily, he doesn't wash 'em clean! He's left egg all ovah this spoon. That's the second time I've had to throw it back into the watah."

" Aunt Emily, it isn't so," mocked Phil, in a high falsetto voice, imitating her accent. " It's bettah than she could do huhself. She's no great shakes of a housekeepah."

" I'll show you," retorted Lloyd, throwing the spoon back into the pan with a splash. " I'm going to make a pie foh dinnah to-day, and you won't get any."

" Then probably I'll be the only one who escapes alive to tell the tale. Aunt Emily, please invite me to dinner," he begged, "and mayn't I stay out here, and watch her make it?"

"Of co'se I can't help it if she chooses to ask you to dinnah," said Lloyd, loftily, when he had received his invitation, "but I most certainly won't have you standing around in my way, criticizing me when I begin to cook. You can fill the wood-box and brush up the crumbs and hang these towels out on the line, if you want to, then you may go in and watch Joyce paint."

"Oh, thank you!" answered Phil. "*Such* condescension! *Such* privileges! Your Royal Highness, I humbly make my bow!"

He bent low in a burlesque obeisance that a star actor might have envied, and, throwing up a saucer and catching it deftly, began to sing:

"The Queen of Hearts she made some tarts,
Upon a summer day.
But none could look — that selfish cook
Drove every one away."

It was all the most idle nonsense, and yet, as they worked together in a playful half-quarrel, Lloyd liked him better than she had at any time before. He reminded her of Rob Moore. He was big like Rob, tall and broad-shouldered, but much handsomer. Rob had teased her since babyhood, and, when Phil began his banter in the same blunt, big-brother fashion, it made her feel as if she had known him always. And yet he was more like Malcolm than Rob, in some respects, she thought later. The courteous way he sprang to pick up her handkerchief, the quick turn he gave to some little remark, which made it a graceful compliment, his gentlemanly consideration for Mrs. Ware — all that was like Malcolm.

Phil would not be driven out of the kitchen until he had exacted a promise from Mrs. Ware that he might come the next day, and make the dessert for the morrow's dinner, vowing that, if it were not heels over head better than Lloyd's, he would treat everybody at the Wigwam and on the ranch to a picnic at Hole-in-the-rock.

" Prop the door open, please," called Joyce, as he went into the sitting-room from the kitchen. " I need some of that heat in here. It's chilly this morning when one sits still."

So Lloyd, moving back and forth at her pastry-making, could see their heads bending over the table, and hear snatches of an animated discussion about a design he proposed for her to put on one of the programmes.

"Put a line from 'Call me thine own' on this one," he said, "and have a couple of turtle-doves perched up on the clef, cooing at each other, and make little hearts for the notes."

"How brilliant!" cried Joyce. "Phil, you're a genius. Do think up some more, for I'm nearly at my wits' end, trying to get thirty different designs."

"Don't make them all so fine," he suggested. "Some of those people will get it into their heads that matrimony is all roses." He lifted his voice a little, so that Lloyd could not fail to hear. She was standing before the moulding-board now, her sleeves tucked up, and a look of intense seriousness on her face as she sifted flour, as if pie-making were the most important business in the universe.

"Make the Queen of Hearts with a rolling-pin in her hand and a scowl on her face, as she will look after the ceremony, when she takes it into her head to make some tarts. Put a bar of 'Come, ye disconsolate,' with a row of tiny pies for the notes, and the old king doubled up at the end of it, with the knave running for a doctor."

"You horrid thing!" called Lloyd, wrathfully, from the kitchen. "You sha'n't have a bite of these pies now."

"Nothing personal, I assure you," called Phil, laughing. "I'm only helping the artist." But Joyce said, in a low tone, "It *is* a little personal, because she used to be called the Queen of Hearts so much. Did you ever see her picture taken in that character, when she was dressed in that costume for a Valentine party? It was years ago. Miss Marks made some coloured photographs of her. You'll find one in that portfolio somewhere, if you'll take the trouble to look through it. She's had so many different nicknames," continued Joyce. Norman was hammering on something in the kitchen now, so there was no need for her to lower her voice.

"She is 'The Little Colonel' to half the Valley, and I suppose always will be to her grandfather's friends. Then when she started to school, about the time that picture was taken, she was such a popular little thing that one of her teachers began calling her Queen of Hearts. Both boys and girls used to fuss for the right to stand beside her in recitations, and march next her at calisthenics, and she was sure to be called first when they chose sides for their games at recess.

"Then, after she was in that play with her dog Hero, that Mary told you about, the girls at boarding-school began calling her the Princess Winsome, and then just Princess. Malcolm McIntyre, who took the part of the knight who rescued her, never calls her anything but that now. There she is, as she looked in the play when she sang the dove song."

Joyce pointed with her brush-handle to another photograph in the pile. It was the same picture that Mary had showed him, the beautiful little medallion of the Princess Winsome, holding the dove to her breast as she sang, "Flutter and fly." The same picture which had swayed on the pendulum in Roney's lonely cabin, repeating, with every tick of the clock, "For love — will find — a way!"

Phil put it beside the other photograph, and studied them both intently as Joyce went on.

"Then the other day, when her father was here, I noticed that he had a new name for her. He called her that several times, and when he went away, he said it in a tone that seemed to mean so much, 'Good-bye, my little *Hildegarde!*'"

Phil looked from the pictures on the table to the original, standing in the kitchen wielding a rolling-pin under Mrs. Ware's direction. The morning sun, streaming through the window, was making a halo of her hair. Somehow he found this last view the most pleasing. He said nothing, however, only thrummed idly on the table, and hummed an old song that had been running through his head all morning.

"What's that you're humming?" asked Joyce, when she had worked on in silence several minutes.

Phil came to himself with a start. "I'm sure I don't know," he laughed. "I wasn't conscious that I was making even an attempt to sing."

"It went this way," said Joyce, whistling the refrain, softly. "It's so sweet."

"Oh, that," said Phil, recognizing the air. "That's a song that Elsie's old English nurse used to sing her to sleep with.

"'Maid Elsie roams by lane and lea,
Her heart beats low and sad.'

She liked it because it had her name in it, and I liked it because of the jingle of the chorus. It always seemed full of bells to me." He hummed it lightly:

"'Kling, lang ling,
She seems to hear her bride-bells ring,
Her bonny bride-bells ring.'

It must have been these bridal musicale programmes that brought it up to me, for I haven't thought of it in years."

"And that suggests something to me," answered

Joyce. “I haven’t used any wedding-bells on these programmes. Now, let me see. How can I put them on?” She sat studying one of the empty cards intently.

“Here! This way!” cried Phil. “I can’t draw it as it ought to be, but I can see in my mind’s eye what you want. Put a Cupid up in each top corner, with a bunch of five narrow ribbons, strung across from one to the other in narrow, wavy lines, and hang the little bells on them for notes. Then the ends of the ribbons can trail down the sides of the programmes sort of fluttery and graceful. Pshaw! I can’t make it look like anything, but I can see exactly how it ought to look.”

He scribbled his pencil across the lines he had attempted to draw, and started to tear the paper in disgust, when she caught it from him.

“I know just what you mean,” she cried. “And Phil Tremont, you *are* a genius. This will be the best design in the whole lot.” She was outlining it quickly as she spoke. “You ought to be a designer. You’d make your fortune at it, for originality is what counts. Why don’t you study it?”

“I did have it in mind for a week or so,” answered Phil, “but I wanted most of all to be an architect, or something of the sort. Father wanted me to study medicine, and grandfather thought I'd do better at civil engineering. But I couldn't settle down to anything. I suppose the truth of the matter was I was thinking too much about the good times I was having, and didn't want to buckle down to anything that meant hard digging. So last year father said I wasn't getting any kind of discipline, and that I had to go to a military school for it. That there I would at least learn punctuality and order, and that military training would fit me to be a good citizen just as much as to be a good soldier."

"What does he think about it now?" answered Joyce. "I beg your pardon," she added, hastily. "I had no right to ask such a personal question."

"That's all right," answered Phil. "I don't care a rap if you do talk about it. It's worried me a good deal thinking how cut up the old pater will feel when he finds out about it. He thought he'd left me in such good hands, shut up where I couldn't get out into any trouble, and I hated to write that they'd fired me almost as soon as his back was turned. If I could have talked to him, and explained both sides of it, how unfair the Major was, and all that, and how we were just out for a lark, with the best intentions in the world, I could have soon convinced him that I meant all right, and he wouldn't have minded so much. But I never was any good at letter-writing, so I kept putting it off the first two weeks I was here. I wrote last week, but it takes a month to send a letter and get an answer, so it'll be some time yet before I hear from him. In the meantime, I'm taking life easy, and worrying as little as possible."

Joyce made no reply when he paused, only bent her head a little lower over her work; but Phil, unusually sensitive to mental influences, felt her disapprobation as keenly as if she had spoken. The silence began to grow uncomfortable, and finally he asked, lightly, toying with a paper-knife while he spoke, "Well, what do you think of the situation?"

"Do you want to know honestly?" asked Joyce, her head bending still lower over her work.

"Yes, honestly."

Her face grew red, but looking up her clear gray eyes met his unflinchingly. "Well, I think you're the very brightest boy that I ever knew, anywhere, and that it would be a very easy thing for you to make your mark in the world in any way you pleased, if you would only make up your mind to do it. But it's lazy of you to loaf around all winter doing nothing, not even studying by yourself, and it's selfish to disappoint your father when he is so ambitious for you, and it's — yes, it's *wicked* for you to waste opportunities that some boys would almost give their eyes for. There!"

"Whew!" whistled Phil, getting up to pace the floor, with his hands in his pockets. "That's the worst roast I *ever* got."

"Well, you asked for it," said Joyce. "You said for me to tell you honestly what I thought."

"What would you have me to do?" asked Phil, impatiently, anxious to justify himself. "A fellow with any spirit couldn't get down and beg to be taken back to school, when he knew all the time that he was only partly in the wrong, and that it was unjust and arbitrary of the officers to require what they did."

"That isn't the only school in the country," said Joyce, quietly, "and for a fellow six feet tall, and seventeen years old, a regular athlete in appearance, to wait for somebody to lead him back to his books does seem a little ridiculous, doesn't it?"

"Confound it!" he began, angrily, then stopped, for Joyce was smiling up into his face with a friendliness he could not resist, and there was more than censure in her eyes. There was sincere admiration for the handsome boy whom she found so entertaining and companionable.

"Now don't get uppity," she laughed. "I'm only saying to you what Elsie would say if she were here."

Phil shrugged his shoulders. "Not much!" he exclaimed. "You don't know Elsie. She thinks her big brother is perfection. She has always stood up for me in the face of everything. Daddy never failed to let me off easy when she patched up the peace between us. *She* wouldn't rake me over the coals the way you do."

Joyce liked the expression that crossed his face as he spoke of Elsie, and the gentler tone in which he said Daddy.

"All the more reason, then," she answered, "that somebody else should do the raking. I hope I haven't been officious. It's only what I would say to Jack under the same circumstances. I'm so used to preaching to the boys that I couldn't help sailing in when you gave me leave. I won't do it any more, though. See! Here is the design you suggested. I've finished it."

Mollified by her tone and her evident eagerness to leave the subject, he dropped into the chair beside her again, and sat talking until Lloyd called them both out to admire her pies. There were two of them on the table, hot from the oven, so crisp and delicately browned, that Lloyd danced around them, clicking a couple of spoons in each hand like castanets, and calling Mrs. Ware to witness that she had made them entirely by herself.

"Don't they look delicious?" she cried. "Did you evah see moah tempting looking pies in all yoah life? I wish grandfathah could have a slice of that beautiful custa'd with the meringue on top. He'd think Mom Beck made it, and he'd nevah believe, unless he saw it with his own eyes, that I could make such darling cross-bahs as are on that cherry taht."

"I wish you'd listen!" cried Phil. "Don't you know that proverb about letting another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth?"

"I'm not praising *me,*" retorted Lloyd. "I'm just praising my pies, and if they're good, and I know they're good, why shouldn't I say so? They're the first I evah made, and I think I have a right to be proud of their turning out so well. Of co'se they wouldn't have been this nice if Aunt Emily hadn't showed me what to do."

"Let's sample them now," proposed Jack, who had been called in from the wood-pile to pay his respects to the pastry.

Lloyd threw herself between the table and Jack with a little scream of remonstrance, as he advanced threateningly with a knife.

"I believe Lloyd is prouder of making those old pies than she was of shooting the duck. Confess, now, aren't you?" he insisted.

"Yes, I am," she answered, emphatically.

"You had your picture taken with a duck," suggested Phil. "Suppose you have one now with the pies to add to your collection. Come on and get your camera, and I'll take a companion piece to the hunting-picture. We'll call this the 'Queen of Tarts.' Stand out back of the tent, and hold the custard pie in one hand, and the cherry tart in the other."

With the dimples deepening in her cheeks as the whole family gathered around to watch the performance, Lloyd took her position out-of-doors, with the white tent for a background. Holding her hands stiffly out in front of her, she stood like a statue, while Jack and Joyce each brought out a pie, and balanced them in the middle of her little pink, upturned palms.

"I want to take two shots," said Phil, waiting for them to step out of range. “There are several blank films left on this roll. Now,” he ordered, when the shutter clicked after the first exposure, “hold still, we'll try another. Suppose you put the plates up on the tips of your fingers, the way hotel waiters do. They carry things that way with such an easy offhand grace. I always admired it.”

“I should say it was offhand!” cried Jack. For Lloyd, obeying orders, clutched frantically after the cherry tart, with a shriek of dismay. It had refused to stay poised on her finger-tips.

“Topside down, of co'se,” she wailed, as the broken plate fell in one place, and the pastry in another. “And the juice is running all ovah me, and the darling little cross-bahs are all in the sand!”

Phil hastily clicked the shutter again. He was sure that the second snap had caught the tart in the act of falling, and with the third film he wanted to preserve the expression of surprise and dismay that clouded Lloyd's face. It was one of the most ludicrous expressions he had ever seen.

“Pride goeth before destruction,” he quoted, laughingly.

“I wish you'd hush up with yoah old proverbs, Phil Tremont,” cried Lloyd, half-laughing and half-angry. “It's all yoah fault, anyway. You knew

I'd spill that taht if I held it that way, and I just believe you did it on purpose. You knew when you first saw those pies it would be useless for you to try to make any dessert to-morrow that would half-way come up to them, and you deliberately planned to get them out of the way, so you wouldn't have to stand the test. You were afraid you'd have to give the picnic you promised."

"Sputter away, if it will ease your mind any," laughed Phil. "It was worth the picnic to see your frantic grab after that tart. But honestly, Lloyd," he said, growing serious as he saw she really cared, "I'm as sorry as I can be that it happened, and I'll do anything you say to make atonement. I'll withdraw from the contest, award you the laurels, and give the picnic, anyhow."

"There's nothing the matter with the custard pie," piped up Norman, "'cept'n you can see where Joyce's fingers jabbed into the meringue when she caught it from Lloyd. I think it would be safer to eat it now before anything else happens."

"No, we'll set mamma to guard it till the rest of the dinner is ready," said Joyce, leading the way back to the kitchen. "If everybody will fly around and help, we'll have it a little earlier to-day."

It was one of the jolliest meals that Phil had had in the Wigwam. "Let's all go to Phœnix this afternoon," proposed Phil, when they had gone back to the sitting-room. "We can take the films in to the photographer, and have them developed. Joyce, you may ride my horse, and I'll get one from Mrs. Lee."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Joyce, looking wistfully through the window. "The outdoors never did look so tempting, it seems to me, and those programmes are getting so monotonous I can hardly make myself go back to them. I wish I could go. But I can't shirk even for a few hours, or they might miss getting there in time."

"Couldn't anything tempt you to go?" urged Phil.

She shook her head resolutely. "'Not all the king's horses and all the king's men' could draw me away from these programmes till they are finished."

"No wonder she preached me such a sermon on loafing, this morning," thought Phil, as he rode away beside Jack, with the roll of films in his pocket. "Anybody with that much energy and perseverance doesn't need to go to the School of the Bees. It makes her all the harder on the drones. And I know that's what she thinks I am."

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE

It was nearly two o'clock next day when the thirtieth programme was finished and placed in the last row of dainty cards, laid out for the family's farewell inspection. While Lloyd cut the squares of tissue-paper which were to lie between them, Joyce brought the box in which they were to be packed and the white ribbons to tie them.

Jack, having saddled Washington, was blacking his shoes and making other preparations for his ride to town. A special trip had to be made, in order to get the package to the Phœnix post-office in time.

"They might wait until morning, I suppose," said Joyce, as she began placing them carefully in piles of ten. "But it is best to allow all the time possible for delays. Then the programmes have to be written on them after they get to Plainsville. Oh, I *hope* Mrs. Link will like them!"

"I don't see how she can help it!" exclaimed Lloyd. "They're lovely, and I think you'd be so proud of them you wouldn't know what to do."

"I am pleased with them," admitted Joyce, stopping to take one last peep at the pretty rose-garlanded Cupids ringing the bride-bells, which Phil had suggested. It was the best design in the lot, she thought.

"Oh, I forgot!" she exclaimed, suddenly, looking up in dismay. "What shall I do? I promised Mr. Armond that I'd let him see these cards before I sent them away."

"You won't have time now," suggested Lloyd.

"I suppose Jack could wait a few minutes, but I thought we'd start over to Shaw's ranch just as soon as the cards were off. I didn't want to lose a minute in getting my hive of bees, after I'd earned them. It's such a long walk over there and back, that I don't feel like going to the ranch first."

"Let Jack stop and show them to Mr. Armond," suggested her mother. "He's always so careful that he can be trusted to tie the box up safely afterward."

"Oh, he's *safe* enough," answered Joyce, "but he'd make such a mess of it, tying and untying the white ribbons on the inside of the package. He can't make a decent bow to save his life. He'd have them all in knots and strings, and after all the care I've taken I want Mrs. Link to find them just as they leave me."

For a moment Joyce stood undecided, regretting her promise to Mr. Armond, and sorely tempted to break it.

"He won't really care," she thought, but his own words came back to her plaintively: "There is so little to interest one here, — if you don't mind humouring an invalid's whims."

She couldn't forget the hopeless melancholy of his face, and what Mr. Ellestad had said to her about him: "He's just where Shapur was when the caravan went on without him." And she remembered that in the story Shapur had cursed the day he was born, and laid his head in the dust.

"I'll go," she exclaimed. "Jack can follow as soon as he is ready, and I'll hand the package to him as he passes. I'll be back as soon as I can, Lloyd, and then we'll start right over to Mr. Shaw's. You explain to Jack, please, mamma, and give him the money to pay the postage."

Stopping only long enough to write the address on the wrapper, she hurried down the road, bareheaded, toward the ranch. Lloyd sat down on the front door-step to wait for her return. Opening a book, in which she had become interested, she was soon so deep in the story that she scarcely noticed when Jack rode away, a quarter of an hour later, glancing up for just an instant as she waved her hand mechanically in answer to his call.

The kitchen clock struck half-past two, then three. With the last stroke came a vague consciousness that it was growing late, and that Joyce was long in coming, but the absorbing interest of the story made her immediately forgetful again of her surroundings.

It was nearly four when Mrs. Ware, coming out beside her on the step, stood shading her eyes with her hand to peer down the road.

" I can't imagine what keeps Joyce so long," she said, anxiously. " It will soon be too late for you to go to the Shaws."

But even as she spoke, Joyce came in sight, running as Lloyd had never seen her run before. She had left the dusty road, and was bobbing along on the edge of the desert, where the hard, dry sand, baked into a crust, made travelling easier.

" Oh, you'll never, never guess what kept me! " she called, as she hurried up to the door, eager and breathless. Seizing her mother around the waist, she gave her a great squeeze.

"Oh, I'm so happy! So happy and excited that I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels. I feel like a cyclone caught in a jubilee, or a jubilee caught in a cyclone, I don't know which. There never was such glorious good fortune in the world for anybody!"

"Do stop yoah prancing and dancing and tell us," demanded Lloyd, "or we'll think that you've lost yoah mind."

Joyce sank down beside her on the door-step. Her face was shining with a great gladness, and she could hardly find breath to begin.

"Oh, there aren't words good enough to tell it in!" she gasped.

"Mr. Armond is an artist, mother, a really great one, who has had pictures hung in the Salon and the Academy. Mr. Ellestad walked part of the way home with me, and told me about him. He studied for years in Paris, and lived in the Latin Quarter, and had a studio there, just like Cousin Kate's friend, Mr. Harvey. And *that's* the man Mr. Armond looks like," she added, triumphantly. "I've been trying to think ever since I first met him, who I had seen before with a short Vandyke beard like his, and long, alive-looking fingers, that seem to have brains of their own."

"And that's what makes you so glad," laughed Lloyd, "to think you've discovered the resemblance? Do get to the point. I'm wild to know."

"Well, he liked my work, thought it showed originality and promise, and, if mamma is willing, he wants to give me lessons. Think of that, Lloyd Sherman, — lessons from an artist, a really great artist like that! Why, it would mean more for me than years of class instruction in the Art League, or anywhere else. He seemed pleased when I told him that I wanted to do illustrating, because he said that that was something practical, and work that would find a ready market. He told me so many interesting things about famous illustrators that he has known, that I have come away all on fire to begin. My fingers fairly tingle. Oh, mamma!" she cried, two great happy tears welling up into her eyes. "Isn't it splendid? The story of Shapur is true! For me the desert holds a greater opportunity than kings' houses could offer!"

"But the price, my dear little girl —"

"And that's the best of it," interrupted Joyce. "He asked to be allowed to do it for nothing. Time hangs so heavily on his hands that he said it would be a charity to give him something to do, and Mr. Ellestad told me afterward, as we walked home, that I ought to let him, because it's the first thing that he has taken any interest in for months; that with something to occupy his mind and make him contented, he would get better much faster.

"When I tried to thank him, and told him that he had showed me a better way to the City of my Desire than the one I had planned for myself, he said, with the brightest kind of a smile, 'I expect to get far more out of this arrangement than you, my little girl. *You* are the alchemist whose courage and hope shall help me distil some drop of Contentment out of this dreary existence.'

"He is going to drive up here to-morrow, to ask you about it, and to see the work I have already done. I'm glad now that I saved all those charcoal sketches of block hands and ears and things. And I'm going to get out all those still life studies I did with Miss Brown, and pin them up on the wall, so he'll know just how far I've gone, and where to start in with me."

"Get them out now," said Lloyd. "You never did show them to me."

There was some very creditable work hidden away in the old portfolio, and, while they talked and looked and arranged the studies on the wall, time slipped by unnoticed.

"Aren't you mighty proud, Aunt Emily?" asked Lloyd, stepping back for a final view, when the exhibit was duly arranged.

"Proud and glad," answered Mrs. Ware, with a happy light in her eyes. "It was always my dream to be an artist myself, and now to see my unfulfilled ambitions realized in Joyce more than compensates for all my disappointments."

"Phil's coming," called Norman, from the yard.

"And we haven't started for the bees!" exclaimed Joyce. "It's so late, we'll have to put it off until to-morrow."

But all plans for the morrow were laid aside when Phil told his errand. He would not dismount, but paused just a moment to invite them to the promised picnic at Hole-in-the-rock.

"Everybody on the ranch is going," he explained. "Even Jo, to make the coffee and unpack the lunch. There'll be a carriage here for you, Aunt Emily, at three o'clock, and you must let Mary and Holland stay home from school to go. No, don't bother to take any picnic baskets," he interrupted, hastily, as Mrs. Ware started to say something about lunch. "This is my affair. Jo is equal to anything, even cherry tarts and custard pies, and I must make the atonement I promised to Lloyd, for spilling hers."

Waiting only long enough to hear their pleased acceptance, he dashed off down the road again. Ever since her arrival in Arizona Lloyd had wanted to see the famous hole in the rock. It lay several miles across the desert, in a great red butte. There was a picture of it in the ranch parlour, and nearly every tourist who passed through Phœnix made a pilgrimage to the spot, and took snap shots of this curious freak of nature.

Climbing up the butte toward it, one seemed to be going into a mighty cave, but when he had passed up into the opening, and down over a ledge of rock, he saw that the cave led straight through the butte, like an enormous tunnel, and at the farther end opened out on the other side of the mountain, giving a wide outlook over the surrounding desert. It was a favourite spot for picnic parties, but of all ever gathered there, none had had so many preparations made for the comfort of the guests. Phil rode over several times; once to be sure that the wood he had ordered for the camp-fire had been delivered, and again to take a load of canvas chairs, rubber blankets, rugs, and cushions, so that even the invalids on the ranch could enjoy the outing.

It was the first of March. Where the irrigating ditches ran, almond and peach orchards were pink with bloom. California poppies, golden as the sunshine, nodded on the edges of the waving green wheat. Even the dry, hard desert was sweet in its miracle of blossoming. A carpet of bloom covered it. Stems so short that they could scarcely raise the buds they bore above the sand bravely pierced the hard-baked crust. Great masses of yellow and blue, white, lavender, and scarlet transformed the bleak solitary places for a little while into a glory of colour and perfume. An odour, sweet as if blown across acres of narcissus, made Mrs. Ware turn her head with a little cry of pleasure as they drove along toward the butte the afternoon of the picnic.

"It's the desert mistletoe," explained Phil, who was following on horseback with Lloyd and Joyce the surrey which Jack was driving.

"It is in blossom now, hanging in bunches from all those high bushes over yonder. Mrs. Lee says it isn't like ours. The berries, instead of being little white wax ones like pearls, shade from a deep red to the palest rose-pink."

"How lovely!" exclaimed Lloyd. "I hope I'll see some of the berries befoah I go home. Oh, deah! the days are slipping by so fast. The month will be gone befoah I know it."

Phil, seeing the wistful expression in the eyes raised to his for a moment, laid a detaining hand on her bridle-rein. "Let's walk the horses, then," he said, laughingly, "and make the minutes last just as long as possible. We'll have to fill the few days left to us so full of pleasant things that you'll never forget them. I don't want you to forget this day anyhow, because it's in your especial honour that this picnic is given — because you're such an accomplished Queen of Hearts."

"Tahts you mean," she answered, correcting him.

"Maybe I mean both," he replied, with an admiring glance that sent a quick blush to her face, and made her spur her pony on ahead.

There were more things than that fragrant, breezy ride across the desert to make her remember the day. There was the delicious supper that Jo spread out under the sheltering ledge of rock at the entrance to the great hole. There were the jokes and conundrums that passed around as they ate, the witty repartee of the boy from Belfast that kept them all laughing, and the stories gathered, like the guests, from all parts of the world.

"This is the first picnic I have been to since the one at the old mill, when you had your house-party," said Joyce, snuggling up beside Lloyd against a pile of cushions, after supper, as the blazing campfire dispelled the gathering shadows of the twilight.

"There is as much difference between the two picnics as there is between a cat and a tigah," said Lloyd, tingling with the horror of an Indian story that the cowboy had just told. "Mine was so tame and this is so exciting. I'm glad that I didn't live out West in the times they are telling about. Just listen!"

Phil had asked for an Indian story from each one, and Mrs. Lee had begun to tell her experiences during her first years on the ranch. No actual harm had come to her, but several terrible frights during a dreadful Apache uprising. She had been alone on the ranch, with only George, who was a baby then, and a neighbour's daughter for company. They had seen the smoke and flames shoot up from a distant ranch, where the Indians fired all the buildings and haystacks; and they had waited in terror through the long hours, not knowing what moment an arrow might come hurtling through the window of the little adobe house, where they cowered in darkness.

In frightened whispers they discussed what they should do if the Apaches should come, and the only means of escape left to them was to take the baby and climb down the jagged rocks that lined the walls of the well. The water was about shoulder deep. Even that was a dangerous proceeding, for there was the fear that the baby might cry and call attention to their hiding-place, or that some thirsty Indian, coming for water, might discover them.

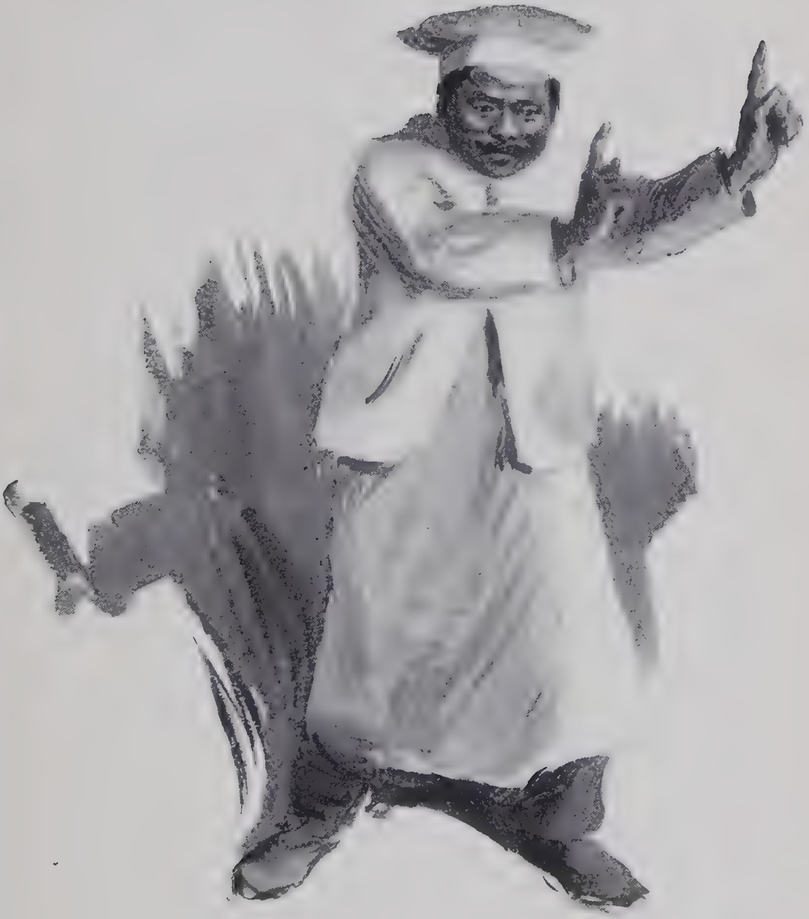
Mrs. Lee told it in such a realistic way that Lloyd almost held her breath, feeling in part the same fear that had seized the helpless women as they waited for the dreaded war-whoop, and watched the flames of their neighbours' dwellings. She shuddered when she heard of the scene that was discovered at the desolated ranch next morning. An entire family had been massacred and scalped, and left beside the charred ruins of their home. Even the little blue-eyed baby had not escaped.

As the twilight deepened, the stories passing around the camp-fire seemed to grow more dreadful. Mary was afraid to look behind her, and presently, hiding her face in her mother's lap, stuck her fingers in her ears. It was a relief to more than Mary when Jo, who had been packing the dishes back into the baskets behind the scenes, came rushing into the circle around the fire so excited that, in his wild mixture of Japanese and broken English, he could hardly make himself understood. He was holding out both forefingers, from each of which trickled a little stream of blood. Each bore the gash of a carving-knife, which had slipped through his fingers in his careless handling of it, as he kept his ears strained to hear the Indian stories.

He laughed and jabbered excitedly, with a broad grin on his face. Finally he succeeded in making Mrs. Lee understand that the cutting of both forefingers at the same moment was the sign that there was some extraordinary good fortune in store for him. It was the luckiest thing that could have befallen him, and he declared that he must go at once to the Chinese lottery in Phœnix.

"If I toucha ticket with these," he cried, holding up his bleeding fingers, "I geta heap much money; fo', five double times so much as I puta in. I be back fo' geta breakfus'," he called, suddenly darting away. Before Mrs. Lee could protest, he was on his wheel, tearing across the desert trail toward Phœnix like some uncanny wild thing of the night.

"The superstitious little heathen!" exclaimed Mrs. Lee. "If he should win, I may never lay eyes on him again. He's not the first good cook that



"HE WAS HOLDING OUT BOTH FOREFINGERS"

I've lost in that way. I have found that, if one once gets the gambling fever, I may as well begin to look immediately for a new one."

"Chris says that he has seen men lose ten thousand dollars at a time," broke in Holland, his eyes big with interest. "Prospectors used to come in from the mines with their gold-dust and nuggets, and they'd spread down a blanket right on the street corner and play sometimes till they'd lose everything they had."

"It's the curse of the West," sighed Mrs. Lee. "I could tell some pitiful tales of the young men and boys I have known, who came out here for their health, got infatuated with the different games of chance, and lost everything. One man I knew was such a nervous wreck from the shock of finding himself a pauper as well as an invalid that he lost his mind and committed suicide. Another had to be taken care of in his last days and be buried by a charitable society, and another had to write to his sister that he was penniless. She sewed for a living, and she sewed then to support him, till she worked herself ill and died before he did. He spent his last days in the almshouse."

"We should have showed Jo Alaka's eyes, and told him the Indian legend," said Mr. Ellestad, pointing up to the stars. "Do you see those two bright ones just over Camelback Mountain? Look up in a straight line from the head, and you will see two stars unusually brilliant and twinkling. Those are the eyes of the god Alaka. He lost them in gambling. An old settler told me the story. He got it from an Indian, and, as I read something like it in a Chicago paper this winter, I think we may be justified in believing it. At least it is as plausible as the old myths the ancients told of the stars, — Cassiopeia's chair, for instance, and Leo's sickle."

"Tell it," begged Lloyd. "I'd rathah heah them than those blood and thundah Apache stories. I'll not be able to close my eyes to-night."

Every voice in the circle joined in the chorus of assents that went up, except Phil's, and no one noticed his silence but Lloyd.

It seemed to her that he had looked uncomfortable ever since Mrs. Lee had spoken so feelingly of the curse of the West; but she told herself that it must be just her imagination, — that it was the flickering shadows of the camp-fire that gave his face its peculiar expression. He moved back into the darkness against the rock, with his hat over his eyes, as Mr. Ellestad began the story:

"Once there was a young god named Alaka sent by the Great Spirit to live awhile among the cliff-dwellers of the Southwest. Now in that country there is a fever that lays hold of the children of the sun. It comes you know not how, and you cannot stop it. And this fever that runs hot in the veins of men began to course through the blood of Alaka, a fierce fever to gamble.

"At first, when men challenged him to pit his skill against theirs, he refused, knowing that the Great Spirit had forbidden it; but they jeered him, saying: 'Ah, ha! He is afraid that he will lose. This can be no god, or he would not fear us.' So when they had made a mock of him until he could no longer endure it, he cried: 'Come! I will show you that I am a god! that I fear nothing!'

"Forgetting all that the Great Spirit had enjoined upon him, he plunged madly into the game. Now the most precious thing known to that people is the turquoise, for it is the stone that stole its colour from the sky. Around the neck of the young god hung a string of these turquoises, and one by one he lost them, till the morning found him with only an empty string in his hand.

"Still the fever was upon him, and he could not assuage it, so he put up his shells from the Great

Water in the west. These people had heard of a great water many days' journey toward the setting sun, but to the dwellers in the Land of Thirst it seemed incredible to them that there could be so much water in the world as Alaka told them of. But they looked upon the exquisite colour of the shells he brought, which held the murmur of the sea in their hearts, and counted them wonderful treasures. And they gambled all day with Alaka to gain possession of them.

"Still the fever waxed hotter than ever within him, and, when he had lost his shells, he put up his measure of sacred meal. When he lost that, they made a mock of him again, saying not that he was afraid to lose, but that he had no skill, that he was not a god. He was less than a man, — he was only a papoose, and that he should play no more until he had learned wisdom.

"Then Alaka was beside himself with rage. 'I will show you,' he cried. 'I will venture such mighty stakes that I must win.' He plucked out his right eye and laid it where the turquoises, the shells, and the sacred meal had lain. But the eye was lost also, and after that the left eye, so that, when morning dawned, he staggered into the sunrise, blind and ruined.

"Then he called upon the Great Spirit to give him back his sight, but the Great Spirit was angry with him, and drove him away into the Land of Shadows. And He caught up the eyes and said: 'I will hang them up among the stars to be a warning for ever to the children of men not to gamble.'

"So they hang there to this day, and the wise look up, and, seeing them, pray to the Great Spirit to keep them from the fever; but the unheeding go on, till, like Alaka, they lose their all, and are lost themselves in the Land of Shadow."

That was the last story told that evening around the camp-fire. The moon was coming up, and Phil brought out Mrs. Ware's old guitar, which he had restrung for the occasion. Striking a few rattling chords, he started off on an old familiar song, calling on all the company to join. His voice was a surprise to every one, a full, sweet tenor, strong and clear, that soared out above all the others, except Mrs. Lee's full, high soprano. The Scotchman rumbled along with a heavy bass. One by one the others caught up the song, even little Norman joining in the chorus. Lloyd was the only one who sat silent.

"Sing," whispered Joyce, giving her a commanding nudge. Lloyd shook her head. "It's so heavenly sweet I want to listen," she replied, under cover of the song. The music and the mountains and the moonlight, with the wide, white desert stretching away on every side, seemed to cast some sort of witchery over her, and she sat with hands clasped and lips parted, almost afraid to breathe, for fear that what seemed to be a beautiful dream would come to end.

A tremulous little sigh escaped her when it did come to an end. "It's time to strike the trail again," called Mrs. Lee. "That is the worst of these outings. We can't stay singing on the mountains. We have to get down to earth again. My return to valley life will take me into the deepest depths if Jo doesn't come back in the morning to get breakfast."

"Oh, it was so beautiful!" sighed Lloyd, later, when the party finally started homeward across the moon-whitened desert. It had taken some time to collect all the chairs, hampers, and cushions which George and Holland took home in the ranch wagon. The moon was directly overhead.

Lloyd was riding beside Phil a little in advance of the others. "It was the very nicest picnic I evah went to, Phil," she said, "and it's the loveliest memory that I'll have to take home with me of this visit to Arizona."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," he answered, taking off his hat, and riding along beside her bareheaded in the moonlight. How big and handsome he looked, she thought, sitting up so erect in his saddle, with his eyes smiling down into hers.

"I don't want you ever to forget — " he hesitated an instant, then added in a lower tone, "Arizona."

The sweet odours of the night came blowing up from every direction, the ethereal fragrance of the mistletoe bloom, the heavy perfume of the orange-blossoms hanging white in distant orchards. Behind them the picnickers began to sing again, "Roll along, silver moon, guide the traveller on his way."

Lloyd looked around for Joyce. She was riding far in the rear of the caravan, beside the carriage where Mrs. Lee led the chorus. Presently the old tune changed, and some one started the Bedouin love-song, "From the desert I come to thee."

Looking down at her again with smiling eyes, Phil took up the words, sending them rolling out on the night in a voice that thrilled her with its sweetness, as they rode on side by side across the moonlighted desert:

"Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment
Book unfold!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOST TURQUOISES

THAT night there was a whispered consultation in Mrs. Ware's tent while Lloyd was undressing in the other one. Sitting on the edge of her mother's bed, Joyce rapidly outlined a plan which she had thought of on her way home.

"You see, I haven't done anything special at all to give Lloyd a good time," she began. "This picnic was Phil's affair. When I was at her house-party, there was something new on the programme nearly every day. She's been here nearly a month now, and her visit will soon be over. I'd like to give her one real larky day before she goes. Mrs. Lee said that I could have Bogus to-morrow, and, as it is Saturday, the children will be at home to help you. So I thought it would be fun for Jack and Lloyd and me to ride over to the Indian school. It's so interesting, and it doesn't cost anything to get in. Then we could go on to the ostrich farm just outside of Phœnix. Lloyd wants to get some kodak pictures of the ostriches. The admission fee will only be seventy-five cents for the three of us. I can pay that out of the money that Mrs. Link sent, and get a nice little lunch at Coffee Al's restaurant, and still have enough left to pay for my hive of bees. We can spend the rest of the afternoon prowling around the curio shops and picture stores. Lloyd wants to get ever so many things to take home, — bead belts and moccasins, and things made out of cactus and orangewood. I haven't said anything to her about it yet, but Phil said that if we went he would join us."

"I think that is a very good plan," said Mrs. Ware, entering into whatever Joyce proposed with hearty interest. "You'd better not tell her to-night, or you'll lie awake talking about it too long, and you'll need to make an early start, you know."

By half-past eight next morning the little cavalcade was on its way, Jack and Lloyd riding on ahead, and Phil and Joyce following leisurely. The road they took led through irrigated lands, and green fields and blooming orchards greeted them at every turn, instead of the waste stretches of desert that they were accustomed to seeing.

"I wish you'd look!" exclaimed Lloyd, drawing rein to wait for Joyce and Phil, and then pointing to a field where a boy was ploughing a long, straight furrow. "That's an *Indian* ploughing there! An Indian in a cadet unifawm, with brass buttons on it. Doesn't it seem queah? Jack says it's the unifawm of the school, and that they have to weah it when they hiah out to the fahmahs. This is paht of their education. I like them best in tomahawks and blankets. It seems moah natural."

"This isn't Hiawatha's land," laughed Phil, "nor the Pathfinder's country. I was disappointed, too, to find them so tame and unromantic-looking, but they're certainly more pleasant as neighbours since they have taken to civilization. You remember the horrible tales we heard last night."

Lloyd had expected to see a large school-building, but she was surprised to find in addition so many other buildings. Dormitories, workshops, a public hall, and the fine, wide streets leading around the central square gave the appearance of a thrifty little village. They lingered long in the kindergarten, where the bright-eyed little papooses were so interested in watching them that they almost forgot the song they were singing about "Baby's ball so soft and round." They went through the great kitchens, where Indian girls were learning to cook, and the tailoring establishment where the boys were turning out the new uniforms. Down in one of the parlours a little eagle-eyed girl, with features strikingly like those of Sitting Bull, practised the five-finger exercises at the piano. Only twice did they see anything that reminded them of the primitive Indians. In one of the workshops a swarthy boy sat before a loom such as the old squaws used to have, weaving patiently a Navajo blanket. And in one of the buildings where dressmaking was taught there was a table surrounded by busy bead-workers, working on chains and belts and gaily decorated trinkets that made Lloyd wish for a bottomless purse. They were all so tempting.

So much time was occupied in watching the classes in wood-carving, and in listening to recitations in the various rooms, that it was nearly noon when they reached the ostrich farm. It was not the ranch where the great birds were hatched and raised, but a large enclosure near the street-car line, where they were brought to be exhibited to the tourists. So, after watching the foolish-looking creatures awhile, laughing at their comical expressions as they tilted mincingly up and down in what Lloyd called the perfection of cake-walking, and taking several snap-shots of them, Joyce proposed that they should leave their horses at a corral farther down the street, and go at once for their lunch.

It was the first time that Jack had been inside the restaurant, and he was glad that Phil, who often lunched there, was with them to take the lead. He felt very young and inexperienced in the ways of the world, as he marched in behind him, and, while he secretly admired the lordly air with which Phil gave his orders, he saw that the girls were impressed by it, too, and he inwardly resented being made to appear such an insignificant small boy by contrast.

He had supposed that they would sit up on the stools at the lunch-counters which one could see from the street. That is where he, in his ignorance, would have piloted the party. But Phil, passing them by, led the way up-stairs. An attractive-looking dining-room opened out from the upper hall, but, ignoring that also, Phil kept on to a balcony overlooking the street, where there were several small tables.

"They serve out here in hot weather," he said, "and it's warm enough to-day, I'm sure. Besides, we'll be all by ourselves, and can see what is going on down below. Here, Sambo!"

He beckoned to a coloured waiter passing through the hall, and soon had him scurrying around in haste to fill their orders. It was the most enjoyable little lunch Lloyd could remember. Phil, who somehow naturally assumed the part of host, had never been so entertaining. Time slipped by so fast while they laughed and talked that the hour was finished before they realized that it had fairly begun.

Then Phil, putting Lloyd's camera on an opposite table, and focussing it on the group, showed the waiter how to snap the spring, and hurried back to his chair to be included in the picture which they all wanted as a souvenir of the day's excursion.

They made arrangements for the rest of the afternoon after that. Jack was to take the camera to a photographer's and leave it for the roll of films to be developed, and then go to a shoestore and the grocery. Phil had an errand to attend to for Mrs. Lee and a few purchases to make. Lloyd had a long list of things she hoped to find in the Curio Building. They agreed to meet at a drug store on that street which had a corner especially furnished for the comfort of its out-of-town patrons. Besides numerous easy chairs and tables, where tired customers could be served at any time from the soda-fountain, there were daily papers to help pass the time of waiting, and a desk provided with free stationery.

It was just four o'clock when Joyce and Lloyd, coming back to the drug store with their arms full of packages, found Jack already there waiting for them. He was weighing himself on the scales near the door.

"I've been knocking around here for the last half-hour," he said. "I'll go out and look for Phil now, and tell him you are ready, and we'll get the horses and bring them around."

"How long will it take?" asked Joyce.

"Fifteen or twenty minutes, probably. He's just up the street."

"Then I'll begin a lettah to mothah," said Lloyd, depositing her bundles on a table, and sitting down at the desk. Joyce picked up an illustrated paper and settled herself comfortably in a rocking-chair.

The big clock over the soda-fountain slowly dropped its hands down the dial, but Joyce, absorbed in her reading, and Lloyd in her writing, paid no attention until half an hour had gone by. Then Lloyd, folding her letter and slipping it into an envelope, looked up.

"Mercy, Joyce! It's half-past foah! What do you suppose is the mattah?"

Before Joyce could answer, she caught sight of Jack, through the big show-window, hurrying down the street by himself. He was red in the face from his rapid walking when he came in, and had a queer expression about his mouth that he always had when disgusted or out of patience.

"Phil's busy," he announced. "He wants me to ask you if you'd mind waiting a few minutes longer. He wouldn't ask it, but it's something quite important."

"We ought to get back as soon as we can," said Joyce, "for I've been away all day, and there's the ride home still ahead of us. I'm afraid mamma will start to get supper herself if I'm not there."

"I think I'll put in the time we're waiting in writing to the Walton girls," said Lloyd, drawing a fresh sheet of paper toward her. Joyce picked up her story again, and Jack went out into the street, where he stood tapping one heel against the curbstone, and with his hands thrust into his pockets. Then he walked to the corner and back, and peered in through the show-window at the clock over the soda-fountain. When he had repeated the performance several times, Joyce beckoned for him to come in.

"It's after five o'clock," she said. "It must be very important business that keeps him so long."

"It is," answered Jack. "I'll go back once more, and if I can't get him away, I'll go around and get the horses and we'll just ride off and leave him."

"Can't get him away!" repeated Joyce. "Where is he?"

"Oh, just up the street a little way," said Jack, carelessly, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb.

Joyce looked at him steadily an instant, then, as if she had read his mind, said, with startling abruptness: "Jack Ware, you might as well tell me. Is he doing what Mr. Ellestad says all the boys out here do sooner or later, getting mixed up in some of those gambling games?"

There was no evading Joyce when she spoke in that tone. Jack had learned that long ago. But, with a glance toward Lloyd, who sat with her back toward them, he only nodded his reply. Startled by the question, Lloyd turned just in time to see the nod.

"I didn't intend to tell on him," blurted Jack, "but you surprised it out of me. He put some money on a roulette wheel, and lost all the first part of the afternoon. Now his luck has begun to change, and he says he's got to stick by it till he makes back at least a part of what he started with."

Joyce looked up at the clock. "We ought to be going," she said, drumming nervously on the arm of her chair with her fingers. Then she hesitated, a look of sisterly concern on her face. "I hate, though, to go off and leave him there. No telling when he'll come home if he feels he is free to stay as long as he pleases. Goodness, Jack! I'm glad it isn't you. I'd be having a fit if it were, and I can't help thinking how poor Elsie would feel if she knew it. Lloyd, what do you think we ought to do?"

"I think we ought to go straight off and leave him!" she answered, hotly. "It's perfectly horrid of him to so fah fo'get himself as a gentleman as to pay no attention to his promises. He made a positive engagement with us to meet us heah at foah o'clock, and now it's aftah five. I nevah had a boy treat me that way befoah, and I must say I haven't much use for one that will act so."

Presently, after some slight discussion, the girls slowly gathered up the bundles and walked up the street to the corral. Jack hurried on ahead, so that by the time they reached it, the men there had the ponies saddled and were waiting to help them mount and tie on the packages by the many leather thongs which fringed the saddles for that purpose.

It was a quiet ride homeward. A cloud seemed to have settled over their gay spirits. Nobody laughed, nobody spoke much. The story of Alaka was still fresh in each mind, and what Mrs. Lee had said about the curse of the West, and the fate of the men she had known who had become possessed by the same fever.

They remembered how Jo had come in at daylight, red-eyed and sullen, after his night's losses, for the lucky feeling which seized him at the sight of his cut fingers had been a mistaken omen of success. All that he had saved in months of service had vanished before sunrise in the same way that Alaka's turquoises and shells and eyes had gone.

Deeper than the indignation in Lloyd's heart, deeper than her sense of wounded pride that Phil should have been so indifferent about keeping his engagement to meet them, was a sore feeling of disappointment in him. He had seemed so strong and manly that she had thought him above the weakness of yielding to such temptations.

She recalled the expression of his face the night before when he drew back from the firelight into the shadow, and pulled his hat over his eyes, as Mr. Ellestad began the story of Alaka. Evidently he had played Alaka's game before.

Ah, that night before! How the whole moonlighted scene rolled back over her memory, as she rode along now, slightly in advance of Joyce and Jack. Phil had been with her that night before, and, as the sweet strains of the Bedouin love-song floated out on the stillness of the desert, something had stirred in her girlish heart as she looked up at him. A vague wonder if it were possible that in years to come this would prove to be the one the stars had destined for her. And, as if in answer to her unspoken wonder, his voice had joined in, higher and sweeter than all the others, as he smiled down into her eyes. But now — there was a little twinge of pain when she thought that he wasn't a prince at all when measured by the yard-stick of old Hildgardmar and her father, much less the one written in the stars for her. He wasn't strong, and he wasn't honourable if he gambled, and she told herself that she was glad that she knew it. And now that she had found out how much she had been mistaken in him, she didn't care any more for his friendship, and that she never intended to have anything more to do with him.

A dozen times on the way home Joyce said to herself: "Oh, what if it had been Jack!" And, thinking of Elsie and the father so far away across the seas, she wished that she could do something to get him away from the surroundings that were sure to work to his undoing if he persisted in staying there.

Supper was ready when they reached home. Afterward there were all Lloyd's purchases to be unwrapped and admired. Mary had hoped for a candy-pull, as it was Saturday, and they had not had one during Lloyd's visit; but the girls were too tired after so many miles in the saddle, and by nine o'clock all lights were out and a deep quiet reigned over Ware's Wigwam and the tents.

The moonlight flooding the white canvas kept Lloyd awake for awhile. As she lay there, listening to the distant barking of coyotes, and going over the events of the day, she heard the approaching sound of hoof beats. Some lonely horseman was coming down the desert road. She raised herself on her elbow to listen, recognizing the sound. It was Phil's horse clattering over the little bridge. But it paused under the pepper-trees.

"I suppose Phil has come up to apologize," she said to herself, "but he might as well save himself the trouble. No explanation could evah explain away the fact that he was rude to us and that he *gambled*. I could forgive the first, but I nevah can forgive being so disappointed in him."

A moment later, seeing no light, and evidently concluding that his visit was untimely, he turned and rode back toward the ranch. Lloyd, still leaning on her elbow, strained her ears to listen till the last footfall died away in the distance.

"He'll be back in the mawning," she thought, as she laid her head on the pillow. "He always comes Sunday mawnings; but he'll not find us this time, because we'll be gone befoah he gets heah."

Joyce had arranged to keep Bogus part of the next day, so that they could ride into Phœnix to church. So it happened that when Phil came up next morning, it was to find nobody but Mary in sight. Mrs. Ware had gone to the seat under the willows to read to Norman and Holland.

The beehive had been brought over during Joyce's absence the day before, and placed in the shade of the bushy umbrella-tree where the hammock swung, and Mary was swinging in the hammock now, with a book in her lap. It was closed over one finger to keep the place, for she was listening to the droning of the bees, breathing in the sweetness that floated in across the desert from its acres of vivid bloom, and paying more attention to the sunny, vibrant world about her than to the hymn she was learning.

"What are you doing, Mary?" he called, as his step on the bridge made her look around. She held up a battered old volume of poems, and moved over in the hammock to make room for him beside her.

"I'm learning a hymn. That's the way we always earned our missionary money back in Kansas. I'm going to Sunday school with Hazel and George this afternoon in the surrey over to the schoolhouse. Her uncle has one there. I didn't have any pennies to take, so mamma said I could begin learning hymns again, as I used to do back home."

As usual Mary rattled on, scarcely pausing to take breath or give her listener a chance to make reply.

"This isn't one of the singing hymns, the kind they have in church. It's by Isaac Watts. I like it because it's about bees, and it's so easy to say:

"'How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower.'

" Joyce picked it out for me, and said that she guessed that Isaac Watts must have gone to the School of the Bees himself, and that was where he learned that ' Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.' The bees hate idle hands, you know, that's the drones, and, although they are patient with them longer than you'd suppose they'd be, it always ends in their stinging the drones to death.

" And Lloyd said it was a pity that some other people she knew not a thousand miles away couldn't go to school to the bees and learn that about Satan's finding mischief for idle hands to do.

" And Joyce said yes, it was, for it was too bad for such a fine fellow to get into trouble just because he was a drone, and had no ambition to make anything of himself. And I asked them who they meant, but they just laughed at each other and wouldn't tell me. I don't see why big girls always want to be so mysterious about things and act as if they had secrets. Do you?"

" No, indeed!" answered Phil, in his most sympathetic manner. He stooped and picked a long blade of grass at his feet.

" And Joyce said that if Alaka had gone to school to the bees, he wouldn't have lost his eyes, and Lloyd said that if somebody kept on, he would lose at least his turquoises. When I asked her what she meant, she said, oh, she was just thinking of what Mr. Ellestad told at the picnic, that the Indians thought the turquoises were their most precious stones because they stole their colour from the sky, and she called turquoise the friendship stone because it was true blue."

Phil began whistling softly, as he pulled the blade of grass back and forth between his fingers.

"So they think that somebody is like Alaka, do they?" he asked, presently, "in danger of losing his turquoises, his friendship stones. Well, I can imagine instances when that would be as bad for Alaka as losing his eyes."

Phil had walked up to the Wigwam more buoyantly than usual that morning. He knew that he owed the girls an apology for not meeting them as he had promised, and he was prepared to make it so penitently and gracefully that he was sure that they would accept his excuses without a question. The big roll of bills in his pocket, which he had won by a lucky turn of the wheel, did not lie heavy on his conscience at all. It rather added to his buoyance of spirit, for it was so large that it would enable him to do several things he had long wished to do. Because of it, too, he had come up to plan another picnic, this time an excursion to Paradise Valley on the other side of Camelback.

But Mary's report of the conversation which had puzzled her gave him an uncomfortable feeling. He could not fail to understand its meaning. Evidently the girls knew what had detained him in town and were displeased with him.

"Oh, aren't you going to stay for dinner?" asked Mary, as he slowly rose and stretched himself. "It's Sunday, you know, and we always expect you on Sunday."

"No, thank you," he answered, yawning. "I've changed my programme to-day."

"Aren't you coming back this afternoon?" she asked, anxiously. "They'll all be home then."

He studied the distant buttes a moment before he answered, then squared back his shoulders in a decided way, settling his hat firmly on his head.

"No," he answered, finally, "I promised a fellow I met in town at the hotel the other day that I'd ride over and see him soon. He has a camp over on the other side of Hole-in-the-Rock, with an old duffer that's out here for rheumatism. I took a fancy to the fellow the minute I saw him, and it turns out that he's the cousin of a boy I knew at military school. It's funny the way you run across people that way out here."

One of Phil's greatest charms to Mary was the deferential way he had of talking to her as if she were his age, and taking the trouble to explain his actions. Now, as he turned away, with a pleasant good morning, it was with as polite a lifting of his hat as if she had been nineteen instead of nine.

She watched him swing down the road with his quick, military step, never dreaming in her unsuspecting little heart that *he* was the mysterious person who, the girls wished, could learn about Satan and the work he finds for idle hands. Nor did she dream that the words she had so innocently repeated were still sounding in his ears: "If somebody keeps on, he'll at least lose his turquoises. It's the friendship stone — true blue!"

CHAPTER XV.

LOST ON THE DESERT

If Washington had not lost a shoe on the way home from church, and if Joyce had not been seized with a violent headache that sent her to bed with a bandage over her eyes, the day would have ended far differently for Lloyd.

The afternoon went by quickly, for, lulled by the drowsy hum of the bees, she had fallen asleep in the hammock under the umbrella-tree, and slept a long time. Then supper was earlier than usual, as Jack wanted his before starting to the ranch. Chris, the Mexican, was taking a holiday, and had offered Jack a quarter to do the milking for him that evening. Holland strolled down the road with him, since the lost horseshoe prevented him taking the ride he had expected to enjoy.

Scarcely were they out of sight when an old buggy rattled up from the other direction, bringing a woman and her two little girls from a neighbouring ranch for an evening visit. Lloyd, who was on her way to the tent to see if she could do anything for Joyce's comfort, heard a voice which she recognized as Mrs. Shaw's, as the woman introduced herself to Mrs. Ware.

"I've been planning to get over here ever since you came," she began, "and specially since I got acquainted with your daughter over them bees, but 'pears like there's nothing in life on week-days but work; so this evening, when my little girls begged to come over and see your little girl, says I to myself, it's now or never, and I just hitched up and came."

"Oh, deah!" sighed Lloyd. "I don't want to spend the whole evening listening to that tiahsome woman. The boys are gone, and Joyce's head aches too bad for her to talk. I don't know what to do."

She stepped softly into the tent, insisting on rubbing Joyce's head, or doing something to make her more comfortable, but Joyce sent her away, saying that the pain was growing less, and that she didn't want her to stay shut up in the tent that smelled so strongly of the camphor she had spilled.

Lloyd turned away and wandered down to the pasture bars, where she stood looking over toward the west. The sun was dropping out of sight. For the first time since she had come to the Wigwam she felt lonesome. She was so full of life after her long sleep, so fresh and wide-awake, that she looked around her restlessly, wishing that something exciting would happen. She was in the mood to enjoy an adventure of some kind, no matter what.

While she stood there, her pony, who had often been coaxed up to the bars for sugar, now came up through curiosity, evidently wondering at her silence. "Come on, old boy," she said, reaching through the bars to grasp the rope that trailed from his neck. "You've settled it. We'll go off and have a ride togethah."

With some difficulty, she saddled him herself, and then because she did not want to disturb Joyce by going back to the tent to change her white dress for her divided skirt, she mounted as if the cross-saddle were a side-saddle, and rode slowly out of the yard bareheaded.

Mrs. Ware fluttered her handkerchief in response to the wave of Lloyd's hand, and looked after her as she took the road to the ranch. "She's going to see Mrs. Lee," she thought, and then turned her attention to her talkative visitor.

It was merely from force of habit that Lloyd had taken the ranch road. She was in sight of the camp before she became aware of where the pony was carrying her.

Then she turned abruptly, hardly knowing why she did so. Phil was at the ranch. She would not have him think that she had gone down with the hope of seeing him. She did not put the thought into words, but that is what influenced her to turn. In front of her Camelback Mountain loomed up, looking larger and more lifelike than usual, with the reflected light of the sunset lying rosy red on its summit. She knew that there is something extremely deceptive in the clear Arizona atmosphere, and had been told that the distance to the mountain was over five miles. But it was hard to believe. It looked so near that she was sure that she could reach it in a few minutes' brisk ride, — that she could easily go that far and back before daylight was entirely gone.

An old game that she had played at the Cuckoos' Nest sent a verse floating idly through her memory:

"How many miles to Barley-bright?"
 "*Three score and ten!*"
"Can I get there by candle light?"
 "*Yes, if your legs are long and light —*
  There and back again!
Look out! The witches will catch you!"

With somewhat of the same eerie feeling that had affected her when she joined in the game with Betty and the little Appletons, she turned the pony into the narrow trail that led across the sand in and out among the sage-brush. Later, those same gray bushes might look startlingly like witches reaching up out of the gloaming.

"It's a good thing that yoah legs *are* long and light," she said to the pony, as he started off with a long, rabbit-like lope. "And it's a good thing that you seem as much at home heah as Br'er Rabbit was in the brush-pile when Br'er Fox threw him in for stealing his buttah. I'm glad it isn't old Tar Baby that I'm on. He wouldn't be used to these gophah holes, and would stumble into the first one we came to. Oh, this is glorious!"

She shook back her hair as the soft, orange-perfumed breeze blew it about her face. Her full white sleeves fluttered out from her arms. Again she had that delightful sense of birdlike motion, of free, wild swinging through space. On and on they went, never noticing how far they had travelled or how dark it was growing, till suddenly she saw that she was not on any trail. A thick growth of stubby mesquit bushes made almost a thicket in front of her. An enormous cactus, thirty feet high, stood in her way like one of the Barley-bright witches. From its thorny trunk stretched two great arms, thrown up as if to ward off her coming. Its resemblance to a human figure was uncanny, and she stood staring at it with a fascinated gaze.

"It's big enough to be the camel-drivah of the camel in the mountain," she said in a half-whisper to the pony. Then looking on toward the mountain, she realized that she had to strain her eyes to see it through the rapidly gathering gloom. Night had fallen suddenly, and the mountain seemed farther away than when she started.

"Oh, it will be black night befoah we get home," she thought, turning in nervous haste. Then a new trouble confronted her. She was facing a dim, trackless wilderness, and she did not know how to get home. She had kept the mountain steadily in view as she rode toward it, but now she realized that it was so large that she could easily do that, and still at the same time go far out of her course.

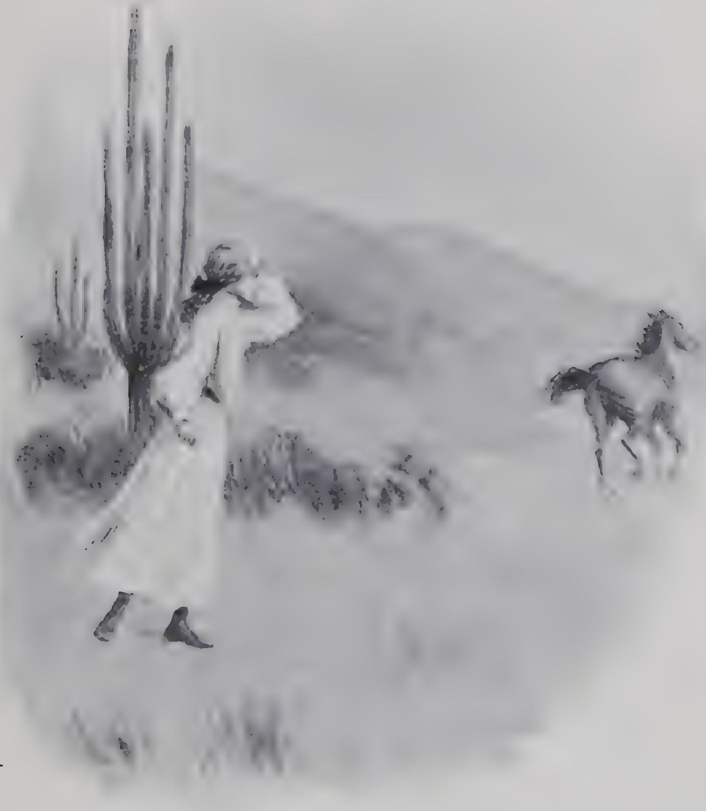
"You'll have to find the way home," she said, helplessly, to the pony, failing to remember that the Wigwam pasture had been his home for only a few weeks, and that, left to himself, he would go directly to his native ranch.

In a few minutes Lloyd found herself carried along a narrow road, not more than a wagon track. While she knew that she had never been over it before, it was some comfort to find that she was on a human thoroughfare, and not lost among the tracks of wandering coyotes and jack-rabbits.

The pony, feeling that he was headed toward his own home, went willingly enough, and Lloyd began to enjoy her adventure.

"How exciting it will sound back in that tame little Valley," she thought, "lost in the desert! I'll give the girls such a thrilling description of it that they'll feel cold chills running up and down their spines. It's a wondah that the cold chills don't run up and down me! But I'm not one bit afraid now. This road is bound to lead to somebody's house, and everybody is so friendly out heah in the West that whoevah finds me will take me home."

The pony swung along a few rods farther, then, startled by an owl rising suddenly out of the wayside bushes with a heavy flopping of wings, jumped sideways with such a start that Lloyd was almost thrown from her seat. It was an insecure one at best, and she was about to throw her foot over into the other stirrup when a forward plunge sent



"CLATTERING DOWN THE ROAD AS FAST AS HIS FEET
COULD CARRY HIM"

the pony into a gopher hole, and Lloyd over his head.

When she picked herself up from the road and looked dizzily around, she gave a little gasp of horror. The pony, freed of his burden and spurred on by his fright, was clattering down the road as fast as his feet could carry him, and she was left helpless in what seemed to her the very heart of the great, desolate desert. She stood motionless till the last faint thud of the pony's hoofs died away down the road. Then she looked around her and shivered. The possibility of the pony's not going straight to the Wigwam had not yet occurred to her, but she felt that under any circumstances she was doomed to stay in the desert until morning. They would be badly frightened at the Wigwam, and would rouse the ranch to send out a searching-party, but they might as well look for a needle in a haystack as to make an attempt to find her in the darkness. She did not know where she was herself. She was within a stone's throw of one of the buttes, but which one she could not tell. She stood peering around her through the twilight with eager, dilated eyes. A twig crackled near her, trampled underfoot by some little wild creature as startled as she. The desert had seemed so still before, but now it was full of strange whisperings and rustlings. Remembering what Jack had told her when he showed her the nest shared by snakes and owls, she dared not sit down for fear some snake should come crawling out of the hole from which the owl had flown. She felt that it would be useless to walk on, since every step might be carrying her farther away from the Wigwam.

How long she stood there in the road she could not tell, but presently it seemed to her that it was growing lighter. She could see the outlines of the butte more distinctly, and the sky behind it was growing gradually luminous. Then she remembered that the moon would be up in a little while, and her courage came back as she stood and waited. When its round, familiar face came peeping up over the horizon, she felt as if an old friend were smiling at her.

"I'm neahly as glad to see you as if you were one of the family," she said, aloud, with a little sob in her throat. The feeling that this was the same moon that had looked down on her through the locusts, all her life, and had even peeped through the windows and seen Mom Beck rocking her to sleep in her baby days, gave her a sense of companionship that was wonderfully comforting.

It was tiresome standing in the road, and, as she dared not sit down and risk finding snakes, she decided to climb up the side of the butte and look out over the country. Maybe she might see the light from some ranch house. At least on its rocky slope she would be freer from snakes than down among the bushes and the owls' nests.

Scrambling over a ledge of rock she stumbled upon a pile of tin cans and broken bottles, which told of many past picnic parties near that spot. A little higher up she clasped her hands with a cry of pleased recognition. She was at the beginning of the great hole that led through the rock. Only two nights before she had sat on that very boulder, and speared olives out of a bottle with a hat-pin. There were their own sardine cans, and the fragments of the teacup Hazel had dropped. A mound of ashes and some charred sticks marked the spot where the camp-fire had blazed.

She looked around, wondering if by some happy chance Jo could have left any matches. A brilliant idea had come to her of lighting a bonfire. She knew that it could be seen from the ranch, and would draw attention to her at once. A long search failed to show any stray matches, and she wondered if she could find flint among the rocks, or how long it would take to get fire by rubbing two sticks together.

Some of the gruesome tales of Apache warfare that had been told around the fire came back to her as she stood looking at the ashes, but she resolutely turned her thoughts away from them, to the Indian school she had seen the day before. It was wonderfully comforting to think of that little Indian girl at the piano, patiently practising her five-finger exercises, and of the Indian boy in the brass-buttoned uniform ploughing in the fields. It made them seem so civilized and tame. The time of tomahawks and tortures was long past, she assured herself, and there was not nearly so much to fear from the peaceful Pimas and Maricopas as there was sometimes from the negroes at home.

So, quieting herself with such assurances, she climbed up to a comfortable seat on a rock, where she could lean back against the cavelike wall, and sat looking out through the great hole, as the moon rose higher and higher in the heavens. Half an hour slipped by in intense silence. Then her heart gave a thump of terror, so loud that she heard the beating distinctly. There was a fierce, hot roaring in her ears.

Down at the foot of the butte, going swiftly along with moccasined tread, was a stalwart Indian. Not one of the peaceful Pimas she had been accustomed to seeing, but a cruel-mouthed, eagle-eyed Apache. At least he looked like the pictures she had seen of Apaches.

He had a lariat in his hand, and he stooped several times to examine the tracks ahead of him, as if following a trail. Instantly there flashed into Lloyd's mind what Mrs. Lee had told them about the Indians allowing their ponies to run loose on the desert. Sometimes the settlers' children used to catch them, and keep them all day to ride. But woe be it, she said, if the owner tracked his pony to a settler's house before it was turned loose. He always took his revenge. Lloyd was sure that this was what the Indian was after, as she noticed the lariat, and the way his keen eyes followed the trail. She almost held her breath as she waited for him to pass on. But he did not pass.

Throwing up his head he looked all around, and then, leaving the trail, started swiftly up the butte toward her. Almost frozen with fear, Lloyd drew back into the shadow, and, rolling over the ledge, drew herself into as small a space as possible, crouching down to hide her white dress. Through a crevice between the rocks she watched his approach with wide, terrified gaze, sure that some savage instinct, like a bloodhound's sense of smell, had warned him of her presence.

For an instant, as he reached the remains of the camp-fire, he stood motionless, looking out across the country, silhouetted darkly against the sky, like the head on the leather cushion she was taking home to her grandfather, she thought, or rather that she had intended to take. Maybe she would never live to see her home again.

She crouched still closer against the rock, rigid, tense, scarcely breathing. With a grunt the Indian stooped, and began poking around among the scraps left by the picnickers. He turned the blackened brands with his foot, then moved farther along, attracted by the gleam of a bit of broken bottle. Evidently the coyotes had been there before him, for not a scrap was left of sandwiches or chicken bones; but, like the coyotes, he knew from past experiences that it was profitable to prowl where picnics were almost weekly occurrences.

The gleam of something steely and bright caught his eye. Lloyd saw the object flash in the moonlight as he picked it up. It was the carving-knife Jo had dropped in his excitement, when he found the "lucky cuts" on his forefingers. With another grunt he turned it this way and that, examined the handle and tried the edge, and then looked stealthily around. Lloyd closed her eyes lest the very intensity of their gaze should draw him to her hiding-place. She knew that another step or two would bring him to higher ground, where he could look over the ledge and see her.

How she ever lived through the moments that followed, she never knew. It seemed to her that her heart had stopped beating, and she was growing clammy and faint. It could not have been more than a few minutes, but it seemed hours to her, when, the suspense growing unbearable, she opened her eyes, and peered fearfully through the crack again.

He had disappeared. Trembling so that she could scarcely stand, she ventured, little by little, to raise herself until she could look over the rock. Then she saw him moving leisurely down the path at the foot of the butte. In a moment more he had reached the road, and, striding along, he grew smaller and smaller to her sight till he disappeared among the dark patches of sage-brush.

Lloyd sank limply down among the rocks again, so exhausted by the nervous strain that the tears began to come. The night was passing like a hideous dream. Half an hour went by. She could hear the distant barking of coyotes, and a nervous dread took possession of her, a fear that their long, gaunt forms might come sneaking up the path after awhile in search of other picnic leavings. She eyed the swaying shadows apprehensively.

Presently, as she sat and watched, tense and alert, she saw some one coming along the wagon track far below. He was on horseback, and riding slowly, as if enjoying the calm beauty of the night. She could hear him whistling. As he reached the foot of the butte the whistling changed to singing. The full, strong voice that rang out on the deathlike stillness was wonderfully rich and sweet:

"From the desert I come to thee!"

It was the Bedouin song. Lloyd listened wonderingly, her lips half-open. Was this part of the dream? she asked herself. Part of the strange, unreal night? That was certainly Phil's voice, and yet it was past belief that he should be riding by this out-of-the-way place at such an hour of the night. But there was no mistaking the voice, nor the song that had been haunting her memory for the last two days:

"Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old."

Lloyd hesitated no longer. Scrambling up from the rocks, she went running down the steep path, calling at the top of her voice, "Phil! Oh, Phil! Wait!"

It was Phil's turn to think he was dreaming. Flying down the path with her white dress fluttering behind her in the moonlight, and her long, fair hair streaming loosely over her shoulder, Lloyd looked more wraithlike than human, and to be confronted by such a figure in the heart of a lonely desert was such a surprise that Phil could scarcely believe that he saw aright.

A moment more, and with both her cold, trembling little hands in his big warm ones, Lloyd was sobbing out the story of her fright. The reaction was so great when she found herself in his protecting presence, that she could not keep back the tears.

He swung her up into his saddle in the same brotherly way he had lifted Mary into the cart, the day he found her running home from school, and proceeded to comfort her in the same joking fashion.

"This is the second time that I have been called on to play the bold rescuer act. I'll begin to think soon that my mission in life is to snatch fair maidens from the bloody scalpers of the plains." Then more gently, as he saw how hard it was for her to control herself, he spoke as he often spoke to Mary:

"There, never mind, Lloyd. Don't cry. It's all right, little girl. We'll soon be home. It's only a few miles from here. It isn't as late as you think — only half-past eight."

Slipping his watch back into his pocket, he began to explain how he happened to be passing. He had stayed to supper at the camp where he had gone to call on his new acquaintance, and had purposely waited for the moon to come up before starting home.

He had put the rein into her hands at first, but now, taking it himself, he walked along beside her, leading the horse slowly homeward. With the greatest tact, feeling that Lloyd would gain her self-possession sooner if he did not talk to her, he began to sing again, half to himself, as if unmindful of her presence, and of the little dabs she was making at her eyes with a wet handkerchief.

"Maid Elsie roams by lane and lea." It was the song that his old English nurse had sung:

> "Kling! lang! ling!
> She hears her bonny bride-bells ring."

When he had sung it through, Lloyd's handkerchief was no longer making hasty passes at her eyes.

"I wonder what my little sister Elsie is doing to-night," he said. "That song always makes me think of her."

"Tell me about her," said Lloyd, who wanted a little more time to regain her composure. He understood why she asked, and began to talk, simply to divert her mind from her recent fright. But presently her eager questions showed that she was interested, and he talked on, feeling that it was good to have such an appreciative listener. He began to enjoy the reminiscences himself, and as he talked, the old days seemed to draw very near, till they gave him a homesick feeling for the old place that would never welcome him again. It had gone to strangers, he told her, and Aunt Patricia was dead.

"Poor old Aunt Patricia," he added, after laughing over one of the pranks they had played on her. "She never did understand boys. We tried her patience terribly. She did the best she could for us, but I've often thought how different it would have been if my mother had lived. I had a letter from Daddy to-day, in answer to the one I wrote about leaving school. It broke me all up. Made me think of the time when I was a little fellow, and he rocked me to sleep one night when I had been naughty, and explained why I ought to be a good boy. It almost made me wish I could be a little kid again, and curl up in his arms, and tell him I was sorry, and would turn over a new leaf."

Lloyd liked the affectionate, almost wistful way in which he spoke of his father as Daddy. Whatever indignation she had felt toward him was wiped away by those confidences. And when he apologized presently, in his most winning way, for not keeping his engagement, and told her frankly what had prevented, she liked him better than she had done before. She wondered how it could be so, but she felt now that she knew him as well as Malcolm or Rob, and that their friendship was not the growth of a few weeks, but that it reached back to the very beginning of things.

"You can't imagine what a fascination there is in seeing that roulette wheel whirl around," he said, "but I'm done with that now. Daddy's letter settled the question. And even if that hadn't come, I would have stopped. I don't want to lose my precious turquoises — my friendship stones," he added, meaningly. "I know how you and Joyce feel about it. Look at old Alaka's eyes, twinkling up there over Camelback. They seem to know that I have heeded their warning."

Presently, as they went along, he glanced up at her with a smile. "Do you know," he said, "you look just as you did the first time I saw you, as you rode up to the gate at Locust, all in white, and on a black horse. Maybe having your hair hanging loose as you did then makes me think so. I never imagined then that I'd ever see you again, much less find you away out here on the desert."

"It is queah," answered Lloyd. "I thought I must be dreaming when I heard you sing 'From the desert I come to thee.'"

"And I certainly thought I was dreaming," answered Phil, "when, in answer to my call, you appeared all in white. You could have knocked me down with a feather, for an instant. I was startled. Then I thanked my lucky stars that led me your way."

He began again humming the Bedouin song. Lloyd, looking out across the wide, moonlighted desert and up at the twinkling stars, wondered if it was fate that had brought him to her rescue; if it could be possible that through him was to come the happiness written for her in the stars.

"There's the Wigwam light," said Phil, presently, pausing in his song to point it out to her. "We're almost there. I'll never forget this adventure — till — " He took up the refrain again, smiling into her eyes as he hummed it. The refrain that was to ring through Lloyd's memory for many a year to come, whenever she thought of this ride across the moonlighted desert:

"Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment
Book unfold!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK TO DIXIE

THERE was another mark on the kitchen calendar now; not a red star, betokening some happy event to come, but a deep black border, drawn all around the date on which Lloyd's visit was to end. The heavy black lines marked the time as only a few days distant.

It was Saturday again, a week after the excursion to the Indian school. Joyce had gone down to the ranch, for Mr. Armond to criticize the drawings which she had made since the last lesson, and Lloyd, on the seat under the willows, was waiting for Phil. He was to come at four, and ride over to one of the neighbouring orange groves with her.

She had a book in her hand, but she was not reading. She was listening to the water gurgle through the little water-gate into the lateral, and thinking of all that had happened during her visit, especially since the night she was lost on the desert, and Phil had found her.

Monday he had spent the entire day at the Wigwam, and, since Joyce had forbidden him to come near the spot where the washing was in progress, he and Lloyd had brought a jar of paste and the little wicker table down to this very seat under the willows, and had mounted all her photographs in the book she had bought for the purpose. There were over a hundred, beginning with a view of the Wigwam and ending with the four laughing faces around the table on the balcony of Coffee Al's restaurant. There was Lloyd on her pony, coming back from the duck hunt, and again in the act of dropping her cherry tart. There was Mary in the hammock watching the bees, Jack in his irrigating boots, and Holland on a burro. There were a dozen different pictures of Joyce, and family groups, and picnic groups, in which was represented every acquaintance Lloyd had made in Arizona. Turning the pages was like living over the pleasant days again, for they brought the scenes vividly before her.

When the last picture was mounted, Phil proposed that they write an appropriate quotation under each one. So they spent another hour over that, Phil suggesting most of them, and at Lloyd's request writing the inscriptions himself in his strong, dashing hand. Some of his apt phrases and clever parodies seemed really brilliant to Lloyd, and they had laughed and joked over them in a way that had ripened their friendship as weeks of ordinary intercourse would not have done.

"Do you know," he said, when the last inscription was written, "I've kept count, and I'm in twenty-five of these pictures. You won't have much chance to forget me, will you? I haven't put my collection in a book, but I have a better reminder of this last month than all these put together."

Opening the little locket that hung from his watch-fob, he held it toward her, just long enough for her to catch a glimpse of her own face within it. Then, closing the locket with a snap, he put the fob back in its place. It was a picture he had taken of her one day as she sat on this same seat under the willows, watching Aunt Emily braid an Indian basket. He had cut out a tiny circle containing her head, from the rest of the group, just the size to fit in the locket.

Lloyd, leaning forward unsuspectingly to look at it, was so surprised at seeing her own picture that a deep blush stole slowly over her face, and she drew back in confusion, not knowing what to say. If he had asked her permission to put her picture in his locket, she would have refused as decidedly as she had refused Malcolm the tip of a curl to carry in his watch.

But Phil had not asked for anything; had not said a word to which she could reply as she had replied to Malcolm. He had showed her the locket in the same matter-of-course way that Rob had showed her the four-leafed clover which he carried. Yet deep down in her heart she knew that there was a difference. She knew that her father would not like Phil to have her picture in his locket, but she didn't know how to tell him so.

It was only an instant that she sat in shy, embarrassed silence, with her heart in a flutter, and her eyes fastened on the book of photographs which she was fingering nervously. Then Jack came out with a pitcher of lemonade, and the opportunity to speak passed. She hadn't the courage to bring up the subject afterward.

"Phil might think that I think that it means moah than it does," she told herself. "He weahs the pictuah just as he would Elsie's, and if I tell him that I don't want him to, he'll think that I think that he cares for me the way that Malcolm does.

I don't suppose that it really makes any difference whethah he has it in his locket or not."

He did not mention it again, but it did make a difference. The consciousness of it embarrassed her whenever she met his eyes. She wondered if Joyce noticed.

Tuesday he came again, and read aloud all morning while they ironed. Wednesday he spent the day without bringing anything as an excuse. Thursday he rode with them over to the Indian reservation. Her pony had been brought back to her the day after it ran away. When he left them at the Wigwam that evening he said that he would not be back the next day as he had to go to Phœnix, but that he would be up Saturday afternoon to ride with Lloyd to the orange grove while Joyce took her drawing-lesson.

It was of all this that Lloyd was thinking now, as she sat under the willows. And she was thinking, too, of the tale Mrs. Walton told her of The Three Weavers; the tale that had been the cause of the Shadow Club turning itself into the Order of Hildegarde.

Mrs. Walton had spoken truly when she said that "Little girls begin very early sometimes to dream about that far-away land of Romance." Lloyd's dreams might not have begun so soon, perhaps, had it not been for the meetings of the Shadow Club at boarding-school, when Ida Shane fired their imaginations with the stories of "Daisy Dale" and "The Heiress of Dorn," and made Lloyd the bearer of her letters to her "Edwardo." The unhappy ending of Ida's romance had been a grave warning to Lloyd, and the story of Hildegarde in the Three Weavers was often in her thoughts. Part of it floated through her memory now, as she realized, with a start, how large a place Phil had occupied in her thoughts the last week.

"Hildegarde worked on, true to her promise, but there came a time when a face shone across her mirror, so noble and fair that she started back in a flutter. 'Oh, surely, 'tis he!' she whispered to her father. 'His eyes are so blue they fill all my dreams!' But old Hildgardmar answered her, 'Does he measure up to the standard set by the sterling yardstick for a prince to be?'"

"That is just what Papa Jack would ask," mused Lloyd. "And he'd say that little girls outgrow their ideals as they do their dresses, and that if I'm not careful that I'll make the same mistake that Hertha and Huberta did. Besides, there's my New Yeah's promise!"

For a moment she ceased to hear the gurgle of the water, and heard instead the ticking of the clock in the long drawing-room at Locust, as she and Papa Jack kept watch beside the embers, waiting for the old year to die and the new one to dawn. And in the solemn hush she heard her own voice repeating Hildegarde's promise:

"*You may trust me, fathah, I will not cut the golden warp from out the loom until I, a woman grown, have woven such a web as thou thyself shalt say is worthy of a prince's wearing!*"

A woman grown! And she was not yet quite fourteen!

"I'll not be the only one of all the Lloyds that can't be trusted to keep a promise," she said, aloud, with a proud lifting of the head. Resolutely shaking herself free from the day-dreaming that had been so pleasant, she picked up her book and started to the house.

Listening to Aunt Emily's conversation over her stocking darning, about the commonplace happenings of the household, was not half so entertaining as letting her thoughts stray back to the moonlight ride, to the smile in Phil's eyes as he showed her the locket, or the sound of his voice as he sang, "From the desert I come to thee." There were a dozen such memories, so pleasant to dwell upon that a girl of less will-power would not have pushed them aside. Even Lloyd found it difficult to do.

"It's like trying to drive away a flock of cherry birds," she thought. "They keep coming back no matter how often you say *shoo!* But I won't let them stay."

Such a resolution was easier to make than to keep, especially as she was expecting to see Phil ride up to the door at any moment. But the time set for his coming passed, and when a step on the bridge made her glance up, it was Joyce she saw, walking along slowly. Usually she danced in after her lesson-hour with Mr. Armond in the gayest of spirits. To-day it was apparent that she was the bearer of bad news.

"Oh, mamma!" she began, dropping her sketches on the table, and fumbling to find her hat-pin. "They're all so worried down at the ranch, over Phil! Mrs. Lee says he went to town yesterday morning, expecting to be back in time for dinner, but he hasn't come yet. Jo went in on his wheel, last night, and he saw him at one of those places where they play faro, and all those games, and he was so excited over his winnings that he didn't even see Jo, although he stood and watched him ever so long. This morning Mr. Ellestad went in, and he came across him, wandering about the streets. He had lost not only every cent he had deposited in the bank, but he put up his horse, and lost that, too. He didn't have any way to get out to the ranch.

" He wouldn't drive out with Mr. Ellestad. He was so mortified and disgusted with himself that he said he couldn't face them all. He said his father would never trust him again, and that he had lost not only his father's confidence, but our respect and friendship. He said he was going to look for work of some kind, he didn't care what, and it didn't make any difference what became of him now.

" Mr. Ellestad left him at a hotel, and he felt so sorry for him that, tired as he was, he rode over to Tempe, after he got home, to see a friend of his who is a civil engineer. This friend is going to start on an expedition next week, surveying for some canals. Mr. Ellestad persuaded him to take Phil in his party, and give him some work. Phil said he didn't intend to touch a cent of his usual monthly allowance until he had earned back all he lost. Mr. Ellestad telephoned to him from Tempe, and he is to start in a few days. Mrs. Lee says that losing everything is the best thing that could have happened to Phil.

It's taught him a lesson he'll never forget; and this surveyor is just the sort of a man he ought to be with, — clean, and honourable, and strong."

As Joyce finished her excited telling with these familiar words, the colour that had faded completely out of Lloyd's face rushed back again. "Clean, and honourable, and strong!" These were the standards of the yardstick that Papa Jack had given her. How far Phil had failed to measure up to the last two notches, and yet —

Mrs. Ware finished the unspoken sentence for her. "He is so young that I can't help feeling that, with something to keep him busy and some one to take a helpful interest in him, he will turn out all right. He has so many fine traits, I am sure they will prevail in the end, and that he will make a manly man, after all."

Joyce openly wiped away the tears that came at the thought of this ending to their happy comradeship, but Lloyd stole away to the tent to hide her face in her pillow, and sob out the disappointment of her sore little heart. She would never see him again, she told herself, and they had had *such* good times together, and she was so sorry that he had proved so weak.

Presently, as she lay there, she heard Holland come clattering up on the pony, inquiring for her. He had killed a snake, she could hear him telling his mother, and had brought it home to skin for Lloyd. It was a beautifully marked diamond-back with ten rattles, and now she could have a purse and a hat-band, like some she had admired in Phœnix.

Lloyd listened, languidly. "An hour ago," she thought, "I would have been out there the instant I heard him call. I would have been admiring the snake and thanking him for it and asking a hundred questions about how he got it. But now — somehow — everything seems so different."

She started up as he began calling her. "I wish he'd let me alone," she exclaimed, impatiently. "Aunt Emily will think it strange if I don't answer, for she knows I'm out heah, but I don't feel like talking to anybody or taking an interest in anything, and I don't want to go out there!"

The call came again. She drew back the tent-flap and looked out. "I'll be there in a minute, Holland," she answered, trying to keep the impatience out of her voice. As she went over to the wash-stand to bathe her eyes, she brushed a magazine from the table in passing. It was the one Phil had brought up several days before to read aloud.

She replaced it carefully, almost as one touches the belongings of some one who is dead.

There were so many things around the tent to remind her of him, it would be almost impossible to keep him out of her thoughts. She confessed to herself that it was growing very hard to keep her Hildegarde promise. She started to whisper it as one might repeat some strengthening charm: "You may trust me, fathah —" She stopped with a sob. This sudden ending of their happy companionship was going to shadow all the rest of her visit.

As her eyes met her reflection in the little mirror hanging against the side of the tent, she lifted her head with determination, and looked at it squarely.

"I *will* stop thinking about it all the time!" she said, defiantly, to the answering eyes. "It will spoil all my visit if I don't. I'll do the way the bees do when things get into the hive that have no right there. I'll seal it up tight as I can, and go on filling the other cells with honey, — doing things that will be pleasant to remember by and by. I'll *make* myself take an interest in something else!"

The same spirit that looked from the eyes of the proud old portraits at home looked back at her now from the eyes in the mirror — that strong, indomitable spirit of her ancestors, that could rise even to the conquering of that hardest of all enemies, self, when occasion demanded it.

Running out to the wood-pile, where Holland impatiently awaited her, she threw herself into the interests of the hour so resolutely that she was soon absorbed in its happenings. By the time the snake was skinned, and the skin tacked to the side of the house to dry, she had gained a victory that left her stronger for all her life to come. She had compelled herself to take an interest in the affairs of others, when she wanted to mope and dream. Instead of an hour of selfish musing in her tent, she had had an hour of wholesome laughter and chatter outside. It would be a pleasant time to look back upon, too, she thought, complacently, remembering Mary's amusing efforts to help skin the snake, and all the funny things that had been said.

“ Well, that hour's memory-cell is filled all right,” Lloyd thought. “ I'll see how much moah honey I can store away befoah I leave.”

There was not much more time, for Mr. Sherman came soon, with the announcement that they would leave in two days. Numerous letters had passed between the Wigwam and the mines, so Lloyd knew what was going to happen when her father arranged for her and Joyce to spend part of one of those days in town. She knew that when they came back they would find a long rustic arbour built in the rear of the tents — a rough shack of cottonwood poles supporting a thatch of bamboo and palm-leaves. Underneath would be a dozen or more hives, humming with thousands of golden-banded bees. And for all the rest of their little lives these bees would spend their "shining hours" in helping Joyce on toward easier times and the City of her Desire.

Something else happened that day while they were in town. Phil made his last visit before starting away with the surveying party. Nobody knew what passed between him and Aunt Emily in the old Wigwam sitting-room, but he came out from the interview smiling, so full of hope and purpose that her whispered *Godspeed* seemed already to have found an answer.

She told the girls afterward a little of their conversation. His ambition was aroused at last, she said. He was going to work hard all summer, and in the fall go back to school. Not the military academy, but a college where he could take the technical course this friend of Mr. Ellestad recommended. Phil admired this man immensely, and she was sure that his influence would be exceedingly helpful. She was sure, too, that he would be all right now, and he had promised to write to her every week.

As Phil came out of the Wigwam he heard Mary's voice, in a sort of happy little chant, as she watched the settling of the bees in their new home. She had heard nothing of Phil's troubles, and did not know that he was going away until he told her.

"I want you to tell Lloyd and Joyce something for me," he said.

"Try to remember just these words, please. Tell them that I said: 'Alaka has lost his precious turquoises, but *he will win them back again, some day!*' Can you remember to say just that?"

Mary nodded, gravely. "Yes," she said, "I'll tell them." Then her lip trembled. "But I don't want you to go away!" she exclaimed, the tears beginning to come. "Aren't you ever coming back?"

"Not for a long time," he answered, looking away toward old Camelback. "Not till I've learned the lesson that you told me about, the first time I saw you, that day on the train, to be inflexible. When I'm strong enough to keep stiff in the face of any temptation, then I'll come back. Good-bye, little Vicar!"

Stooping, he kissed her gently on each plump cheek, and turned hastily away. She watched him go off down the road through a blur of tears. Then she rubbed her sleeve across her eyes. He had turned to look back, and, seeing the disconsolate little figure gazing after him, waved his hat. There was something so cheery and hopeful in the swing he gave it, that Mary smiled through her tears, and answered with an energetic fluttering of her white sunbonnet, swung high by its one string.

Joyce's delight on her return, when she found the long row of hives, was something good to see. She could hardly speak at first, and walked from one hive to another, touching each as she passed, as if to assure herself that it was really there, and really hers.

"Joyce is so bee-wildered by her good fortune that she is almost bee-side herself," said Holland, when he had watched her start on her third round of inspection.

"That's the truth," laughed Joyce, turning to face Lloyd and her father. "I'm so happy that I don't know what I'm doing, and I can't begin to thank you properly till I've settled down a little."

There was no need of spoken thanks when her face was so eloquent. Even the mistakes she made in setting the supper-table spoke for her. In her excitement she gave Mr. Sherman two forks and no knife, and Lloyd three spoons and no fork. She made the coffee in the teapot, and put the butter in a pickle-dish. Only Mary's warning cry saved her from skimming the cream into the syrup-pitcher, and she sugared everything she cooked instead of salting it.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she cried, when her mistakes were discovered, "but if you were as happy as I am you'd go around with your head in the clouds too."

After supper she said to Mr. Sherman, as they walked out to the hives again, "You see, I'd been thinking all day how much I am going to miss Lloyd, and what a Road of the Loving Heart she's left behind her on this visit. We've enjoyed every minute of it, and we'll talk of the things she's said and done for months. Then I came home to find that she's left not only a road behind her, but one that will reach through all the years ahead, a road that will lead straight through to what I have set my heart on doing. I'm going into bee culture with all my might and main, now, and make a fortune out of it. There'll be time enough after that to carry out my other plans.

"To think," she added, as Lloyd joined them, "when I first came to the Wigwam I was so lonesome and discontented that I wanted to die. Now I wouldn't change places with any other girl in the universe."

"Not even with me?" cried Lloyd, in surprise, thinking of all she had and all that she had done.

"No, not even with you," answered Joyce, quoting, softly, "For me the desert holds more than kings' houses could offer."

The last two days of Lloyd's visit went by in a whirl. As she drove away with her father, in the open carriage that had been sent out of town for them, she stood up to look back and wave her handkerchief to the little group under the pepper-trees, as long as the Wigwam was in sight. Then she kept turning to look back at old Camelback Mountain, until it, too, faded from sight in the fading day. Then she settled down beside her father, and looked up at him with a satisfied smile.

"Somehow I feel as if my visit is ending like the good old fairy-tales — 'They all lived happily evah aftah.' Joyce is *so* happy ovah the bees and Mr. Armond's lessons. Aunt Emily is lots bettah, the boys have so much to hope for since you promised to help Holland get into the Navy, and make a place for Jack at the mines. As for Mary, she is so blissful ovah the prospect of a visit to Locust next yeah, that she can't talk of anything else."

"And what about my little Hildegarde?" asked Mr. Sherman. "Did the visit do anything for her?"

"Yes," said Lloyd, growing grave as the name Hildegarde recalled the promise that had been so hard to keep, and the victory she had won over herself the day she turned away from her day-dreams and her disappointment to interest herself in other things. She felt that the bees had shown her a road to happiness that would lead her out of many a trouble in the years to come. She had only to follow their example, seal up whatever had no right in her life's hive, or whatever was spoiling her happiness, and fill the days with other interests.

"Oh, I'm lots wiseah than when I came," she said, aloud. "I've learned to make pies and coffee, and to i'on, and to weave Indian baskets."

"Is that the height of your ambition?" was the teasing reply. "You don't soar as high as Joyce and Betty."

"Oh, Papa Jack, I know you'll be disappointed in me, but, honestly, I can't help it! I haven't any big ambitions. Seems to me I'd be contented always, just to be you'ah deah little daughtah, and not do any moah than just gathah up each day's honey as it comes and lay up a hive full of sweet memories for myself and othah people."

"That suits me exactly," he answered, with an approving nod. "Contented people are the most comfortable sort to live with, and such an ambition as yours will do more good in your little corner of the world than all the books you could write or pictures you could paint."

The engine was steaming on the track when they drove up to the station. Waffles, the coloured man whom Mr. Robeson had brought with him as cook, hung over the railing of the rear platform, whistling "Going Back to Dixie."

"How good that sounds!" exclaimed Lloyd, as her father helped her up the steps. "Now that we are really headed for home, I can hardly wait to get back to the Valley and tell mothah and Betty about my visit. I don't believe anybody in the whole world has as many good times to remembah as I have. Or as many good times to look forward to," she added, later, when, with a mighty snorting and puffing, the engine steamed slowly out of the station, and started on its long homeward journey.

As they rumbled on, she began picturing her arrival, the welcome at the station, and her meeting with her mother and Betty and the Walton girls. How much she had to tell them all, and how many delightful meetings she would have with the club! Her birthday was only two months away. Then the locusts would be white with bloom, and after that vacation. With the coming of summer-time to the Valley would come Rob to measure with her at the measuring-tree, to play tennis, and to share whatever the long summer days held in store.

With a vague sense that all sorts of pleasantness awaited her there, her thoughts turned eagerly toward Kentucky. Even the car-wheels seemed to creak in pleased anticipation, and keep time to the tune she hummed half under her breath:

"My heart turns back to Dixie,
And I — must — go!"

THE END.

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